




# LAMPS OF INDIA

D.G. KELKAR





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*Dr. D.G. Kelkar presenting the First Edition of the book 'Lamps of India' to Prime Minister Pt. Jawahar Lal Nehru*



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D. G. KELKAR

*Foreword by*  
Dr. Rajendra Prasad

*Illustrations*  
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*Photographs*  
Kelkar Memorial Museum, Pune



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## FOREWORD

Few countries can vie with India in the wealth of imagery and symbolism built around the lamp. Our ancestors associated the lamp with almost all important events and activities of man's transitory existence on earth. The birth of a child was greeted with a lamp and it was with it, again, that warriors were given a send-off and triumphant armies returning from the battle-field were welcomed home. In temples and other places of worship the lamp had a still more prominent role. Being the medium through which a glimpse of the deity could be had, the lamp acquired an importance commensurate with the faith of the devotee. Consequently it attracted a good deal of attention at the hands of artists and craftsmen.

It was, indeed, a happy thought on the part of Dr. D.G. Kelkar to have laboured for collecting the various types of lamps used in India for a variety of purposes. This collection, which I am glad the Publications Division of the Government of India is bringing out in the form of an illustrated book, furnishes an insight into the history of lamps from ancient to modern times. The wealth of information it gives and the subsidiary light it throws on popular beliefs and tastes is a tribute to Dr. Kelkar's scholarship and industry. I have no doubt, the book will be a welcome addition to our literature on art and antiquities.

April 14, 1961  
Chaitra 24, 1883 (Saka)

Dr. Rajendra Prasad





## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This Book is an illustrative, and not an exhaustive account of Indian lamps originally penned by Padmashree (Late) Dr. Dinkar Gangadhar Kelkar, founder of the world famous Raja Dinkar Kelkar Museum from the historic city of Pune. It does not pretend to be more than a preliminary survey but this book certainly serves the purpose of bringing in focus the multifaceted and rich cultural heritage of India.

The Author has attempted to indicate the historical, archeological and cultural factors that influenced the design and making of Indian traditional lamps.

The wide variety of Indian traditional lamps presented in this Book would generate enthusiastic curiosity about the intricate craftsmanship of its creators - the unknown artisans from the Indian sub-continent. Even though the notes and annotations have been addressed by the Author to the specialists in Oriental Archeology and Museology, the non-specialists, too will find them useful as a reference material.

All the lamps described in this Book are from the vast collection, single handedly collected by Dr. D.G. Kelkar for the Museum, who had immense knowledge of the subject. Dr. Kelkar also engaged in detailed discussions with eminent scholars of art and archeology of his times in order to ascertain the correctness of the data.

Majority of the lamps described in this Book are of Brass; those made of other material have been mentioned accordingly. The lamps of Nepalese origin are also included in this Book for the reason, which will be readily appreciated, that the Indian and Nepalese craftsmen have been inspired by the same creative impulse.

Thus in the acknowledgement in the first edition, the Author expressed his gratitude for all the scholars, friends, close relatives, wellwishers and artists who helped him in his efforts and encouraged him all the way to present this unique Book "Lamps of India".

Importantly, the Foreword for this book was written by none other than Dr. Rajendra Prasad, the First President of India.

On behalf of Raja Dinkar Kelkar Museum, I thank the Publications Division of the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting for bringing out the Second Revised Edition of **Lamps of India** in the form of an art book.

***Sudhanva Ranade***

Director,  
Raja Dinkar Kelkar Museum, Pune  
August 24, 2011  
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2. A sun-lamp with a chariot drawn by seven horses representing the seven days of the week and twelve more horses representing the twelve months. Height 28.5 cm. 18th century, Nepal



## INTRODUCTION

इदं ज्योतिषां ज्योतिरुत्तमम्

*This light, the best of lights, the most excellent*  
*Rigveda*

Many millennia before recorded history-in the Eolithic, Palaeolithic and the Neolithic eras-Man, like the other species, lived in cave and forest. He wandered about hunting and, when no game was killed, he ate such wild fruits and roots as were available to satisfy his hunger. He seldom could venture out after sunset. Darkness was to him a demon, and the Sun, the giver of light, a deity.

With the passage of time he made another discovery, fire. Fire, he found, was light giving and life-sustaining. Man, therefore, saw fire as a deity, as *Agni*.

The *Rigveda* gives the greatest importance to *Agni*. He is next only to *Indra*, his twin brother. The terrestrial flame, the serial flash and the celestial globe are the three forms of *Agni*. Born of *āraneees*, i.e., igniting sticks, this god banishes darkness, frightens the demons and invokes the light. He is the supreme counsellor, ancient but eternally young.

अग्निमीळे पुरोहितम्

*I glorify Agni, the high priest of sacrifice*

*Rigveda*

The *Rigveda* describes *Agni* as the only master of the house and village and of sacrifice. He has flaming teeth; *ghee* and wood are his food. He is omniscient (*jātavēdasa*); a poet; an immortal mediator (*dūta*) between man and the gods. He conveys to them the *yajna* offerings and he upholds domestic life. Vedic literature is full of reverent prayers to *Agni*.



1. A Kinnari lamp, height 72 cm.  
18th century, South India



We similarly find a number of hymns devoted to the Sun-God, *Agni's* celestial form. The Vedas credit *Bhrigu* with the discovery of *Agni* around whom was built the sacrificial altar.

इदं ज्योतिः अमृतं मर्त्येषु

*This is the light immortal amongst mortals.*

*Rigveda*

The flaming sacrificial altar in the *āshramas* of the *rishis* was the focus of faith during the Vedic times. It has witnessed great philosophic seminars which produced the *Brahmanas*, the *Upanishads* and the *Sanhitas*. The cultural tradition of ancient India has thus its genesis in the spark of the *yajna-vedi*. This spark later assumed the form of a lamp.

अग्निर्ज्योतीरविर्ज्योतिश्चंद्रज्योतिस्तथैव च ।

उत्तमः सर्व ज्योतिषां दीपोऽयम् ।

*Among the light of fire,  
the light of the sun, the  
light of the moon, this  
lamp is the best of lights.*

*Skandapurana*

With the *deepa*, the lamp, begins a new chapter in civilisation, that which may be called the *Deepa-yuga*.

सूर्याश संभवो दीपः

*The lamp (is) born from  
the Sun*

As the symbol of *Surya* and *Agni*, the lamp has always been deemed auspicious. It was dutifully and religiously offered to Him who bestowed it upon mankind. The lamp was indispensable for prayer. It was a sacred token of devotion, supplication and benediction. The gods were believed to dwell by the

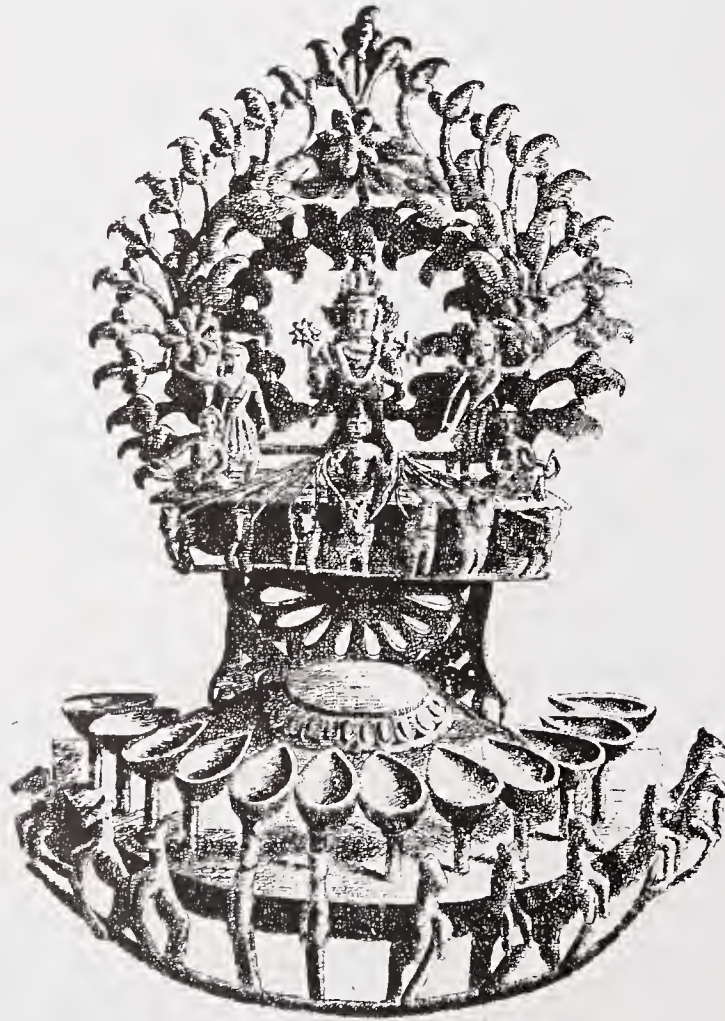
light of the holy lamp. Its very existence helped man to shed the fear of the dark. To man, light was knowledge.

The lamp was sacred; and once its august function was gratefully accepted by man, it was but natural that he should try to adorn it with beauty and grace, that he should make *sundara* what was *siva*. The body of the lamp, to begin with, was of stone or shell. Later came the innovation of terracotta lamps and then metal lamps. The *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*, our two great epics, make extensive reference to lamps of gold and of precious stones.

Because of its uncontested place lamp should have found mention in the ancient scriptures and secular writing. Reference to the Vedic and post-Vedic literature has already been made.

अयं दीपः अमृतं मर्त्येषु  
*This lamp is immortal  
amongst mortals.*

*Valmiki*, in his description of Lanka in the *Sundara-Kānda* of the *Ramayana*, has referred to the *ratna-deepa*. *Vyasa*, in his description of war by the night in the *Drona-Parva* of the *Mahabharata*, gives a thrilling account of manoeuvres by lamp-light. After describing the lamps among the elephant columns and the cavalry in minute detail, he remarks: “*Yakshas, Kinnaras, Gandharvas*, all of the Heavenly kingdom and the gods themselves, had congregated to witness the unprecedented battle. They had, in their turn, brought



2. A Sun-lamp, with a chariot drawn by seven horses representing the seven days of the week and twelve more horses representing the twelve months. Height 28.5 cm. 18th century, Nepal

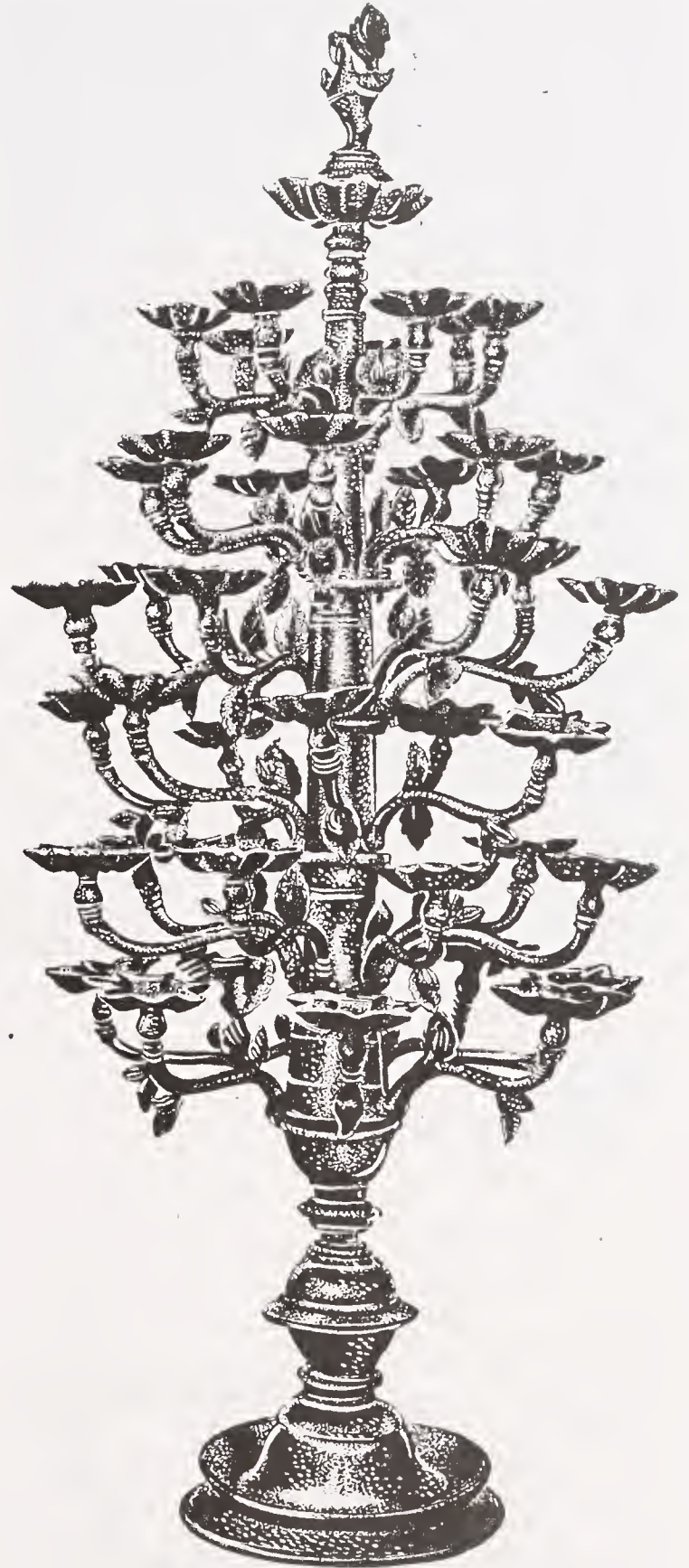


with them rows of lights. These *ratna mālās*—strings of diamond lights—added their light to the bright lights of the battlefield, and those who saw this unique sight, continues Vyasa, were the most fortunate on earth”. The description of how *Mayasura* fooled the *Kauravas* with hidden lights in the palace which he built for *Pandavas* is another luminous passage in the *Mahabharata*.

Indian Philosophy calls the soul a self-lighted torch. The flame of the lamp is likened to the Supreme Self. Life is like a lamp and the endeavour of the enlightened should be to brighten up others’ lives. Ancient texts elaborate the nature of this function. To live for oneself, like a little lamp, is the *tāmasa dharma*; to live for others, like the *deepa-mala*, is *rājasa-dharma* and to live one’s life in the contemplation of the Universal Power is *sāttvika-dharma*. Lord Krishna has expounded in the *Bhagavad-Gita* the nature of the perfect mind. Among the characteristics enumerated is that such a mind is steady like a flame unshaken by the wind. The ancient *sutras* find a symbolic parallel for every phase and every turn of man’s life in one type of lamp or another. That is how the lamp has become a symbol of Indian aspiration.

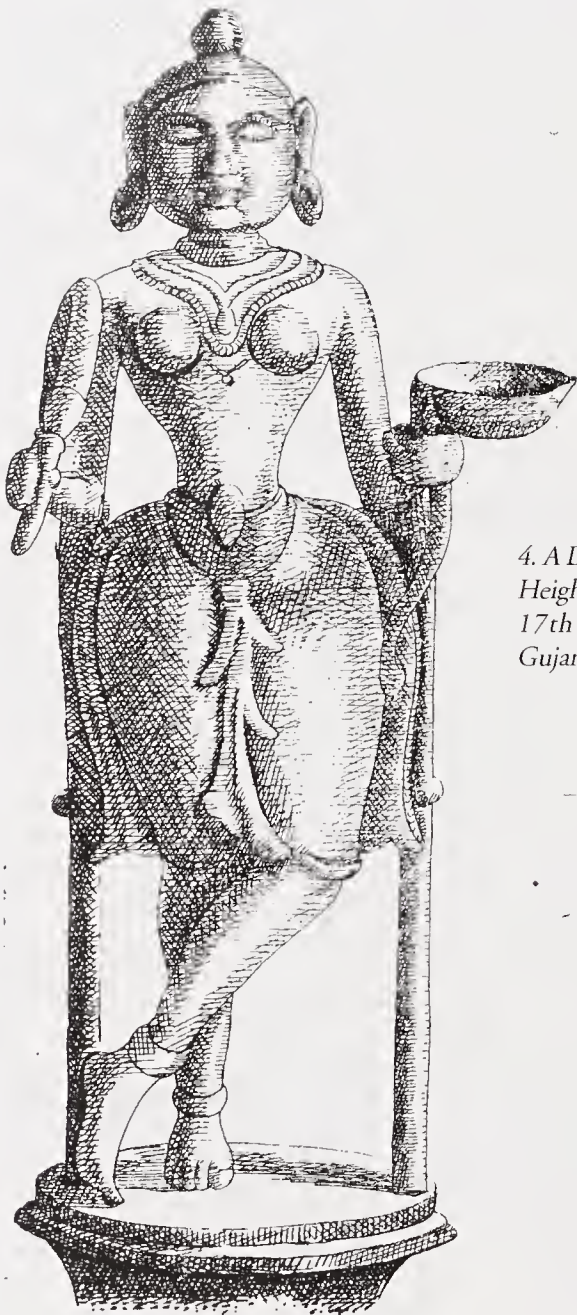
Mythology has made a powerful and continuous impact on the evolution of the lamp. The ten incarnations of the God Vishnu have been an unfailing source of inspiration for the lamp-maker. Mythology has always fed the imagination of all our artists and craftsmen. Innumerable are the lamps which depict the incarnation-themes, such as *Matsya*, *Kurma* and *Varāha*. The lamps of Gokarna-Mahabaleshwar also show us that divine emblems like the *Sankha*, *Chakra*, *Gada* and *Padma* were also frequently adapted.

Kalidasa is renowned as the ‘tip of the flame’ in Sanskrit literary history. He himself never tires of using metaphors connected with lamps. For instance, in his description of the *swayamvara* of Indumati (Raghuvansa S. VI) he says:



3. A Vriksha Deepa or tree-shaped lamp. Height 135 cm. 18th century, Hyderabad

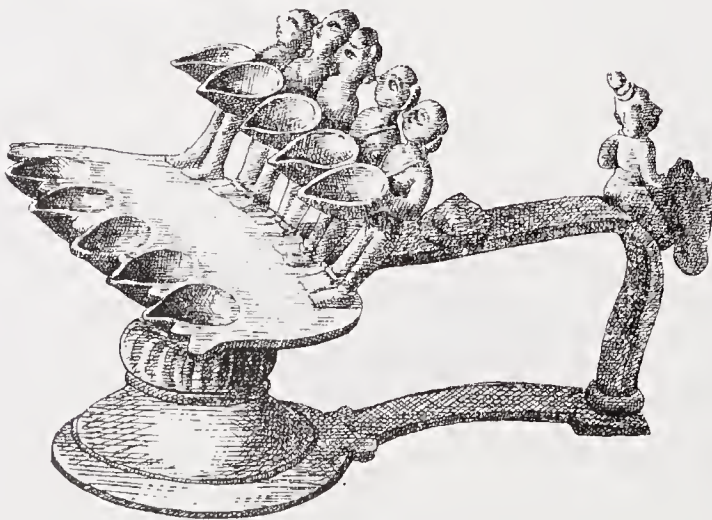




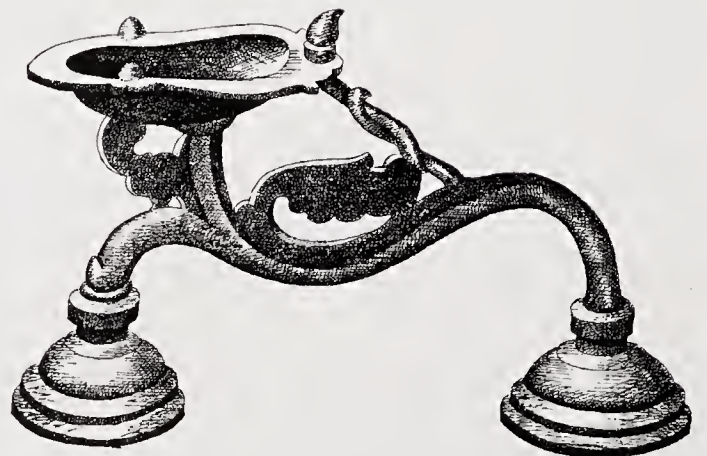
4. A Deepa Lakshmi.  
Height 16 cm.  
17th century,  
Gujarat



7. A 'mashal'. This is a temple torch specially used by devotees of God Khandoba. The projecting portion on the top is wrapped with rough cloth and soaked in oil to be lit when the deity is taken out in procession. Height 62 cm. 16th century, Deccan



5. A Pancharati votive lamp (arati) showing five maidens who wait upon Khandoba, the God of War. A pure example of virile folk art. Height 13 cm. 15th century, Deccan



6. A votive lamp with a single bowl.  
Height 12 cm. 17th century, South India



संचारिणी दीपशिखेव रात्रौ,  
यं यं व्यतीयाय पतिंवरा सा।

(*Indumati according to the poet, moved like the tip of a flame during the selection parade. The faces of the hopeful kings brightened up on her approach and darkened when she went past them.*)

In the *Meghadoota* the *Yaksha* describes the lamps used in sleeping chambers in *Alakanagari* and calls them jewel-lamps.

Dnyaneshwar called one of his metaphysical treatise *Bhāvārtha-deepika*. The famous poet and philosopher of Vijayanagar, Vidyaranya, in his *Pancha-dashi* has used the lamp metaphor for every chapter heading, for example *Jnana-deepa*, *Dhyana-deepa*, and so on.

In Indian folklore, too, the king or queen of lamps - especially the queen, *deepa-rani*-has a prominent place. It is the lamp which exposes the working of the evil spirits. The *Deepa-rani* closely watches the incidents in the household and protects the innocent from any harm planned against them. She cleans up the vitiated atmosphere and drives away dark thoughts.

At first the *deepa-pātra* the body of the lamp, was bowl-shaped, with a beak at the side for a wick. It was later given a graceful base. Separate wooden or stone pedestals supported a bowl. The pedestals, to start with, were round or rectangular. Emulating the variegated decorations of renowned temples, the artist naturally took upon himself the task of beautifying the lamp-stands, whether they were of wood, stone or metal. Later still, the stand came to be an integral part of the lamp. This gave rise to the concept of a tree like lamp. Two main types of trees were emulated; one with outspreading branches like the *aswattha* (f. 3) and the other conical like the pine.

The lamp has a twofold function. It is the bearer of light for common use; and it also has a votive use at the time of domestic rites and festivals.

There are many types of votive lamps; lamps with large pedestals which shed a steady light over spacious halls (f. 51) little lights used for daily domestic



8. A. Vrindavan Deepa, which is placed near the Tulsi tree worshipped in the courtyard of every house. The oil bowl is placed inside by opening the shutter of the lamp. Height 35 cm. 16th century, Deccan

worship (*niranjana*), lamps for offerings-*archana-deepa*; prayer lamps-*ārati-deepa* (f. 34); and the *nandadeepa*, the eternal lamp which illumines the inner sanctuary of the temple. Also used to adorn the sanctuary are *deepa-lakshmis*. Shaped in the form of graceful females, these are anything from seven inches to seven feet in height, and are of brass or carved stone.

Near the main gate of a temple stands, sentry-like, a tall column of stone, usually forty feet to a hundred and fifty feet or more in height, with niches decoratively carved along its sides to hold earthen lamps, The *deepa stambha* with its rows of lights, endows the temple atmosphere with a mellow and reverent splendour.







10. A lamp in the shape of a 'Kumbha' or pot. A 'nagini' or she-cobra is shown pouring water into a shell, while the infant Krishna crawls up the handle. Height 27 cm. 19th century, Nepal







9. A Ganesha Deepa showing a six-handed Ganapati with a lamp.  
The wick peeps out of the mouse which is Ganapati's legendary mount.  
Height 16 cm. 19th century, Nepal







Of *ratid* lamps, or lamps used for consecration, there are innumerable varieties. The devotee, the host or the priest holds the *árati* in his right hand or with both hands. Naturally a handle is called for. The handle is carved variously in the shape of a cobra, a fish or some other being. With the cobra motif the artist's fancy naturally associates the famous *Kalia* of the epics and the child Krishna is shown as vanquishing the great *Kalia* by stamping on his hood. The lotusnave (f. 34) is also popular as a motif. Another picturesque motif is *pañchārati* which shows five *suvāsinis* followed by a horse with a graceful rider. Most probably this rider represents *Khandoba*, the Lord of the Battlefield (f. 5). The *árati* has anything from one to two hundred and fifty-one wicks fed by *ghee* (f. 33).

In the act of consecration the flame in the *árati* represents the soul of the devotee which is offered to the deity. It is rekindled with the divine light of the Creator, Preserver and Destroyer. The devotee integrates Self with the Supreme Being. Such surrender is the core of prayer.

तमसो मा ज्योतिर्गमय

*Lead me from darkness to light*

This is the Vedic form of *árati*. Later, the supplication of the *bhakta* (devotee) also took the form of *árati*. To forget the Self in the sacred invocation of heavenly power, to be one with it, is the quintessence of *árati* as of *bhakti*. The prayer hymns and chants sung to the accompaniment of *árati* in every tongue and every region of India, in the past and to this day, are one of our invaluable cultural assets; the prayer songs at once enriched our literatures and helped the evolution of our music.

It would be appropriate to examine the distinctive place occupied by *árati* in our cultural tradition. Temple halls have been used in our country not only for collective prayers and discourses

11. A hanging lamp held by the figure of a girl acrobat. Height 28 cm. 18th century, South India





but also for cultural assemblages. Entire villages used to collect in these halls to listen to music or to see *nritya* during festivals. It was necessary on such occasions to brighten the halls. Thus came into being the many-flamed, beautiful, hanging lotus lamps. To illuminate the actions, expressions and *mudras* of the speaker, preacher, musician or dancer, many-petalled standing lamps of large size were used. Privileged spectators and rich members of the audience visited the temples in carts, chariots or man-borne *menas*. Their path was lit by torches or, sometimes, lamps with small handles (f. 7). called *mashals* and *divtis*, they often tended to be decorative.

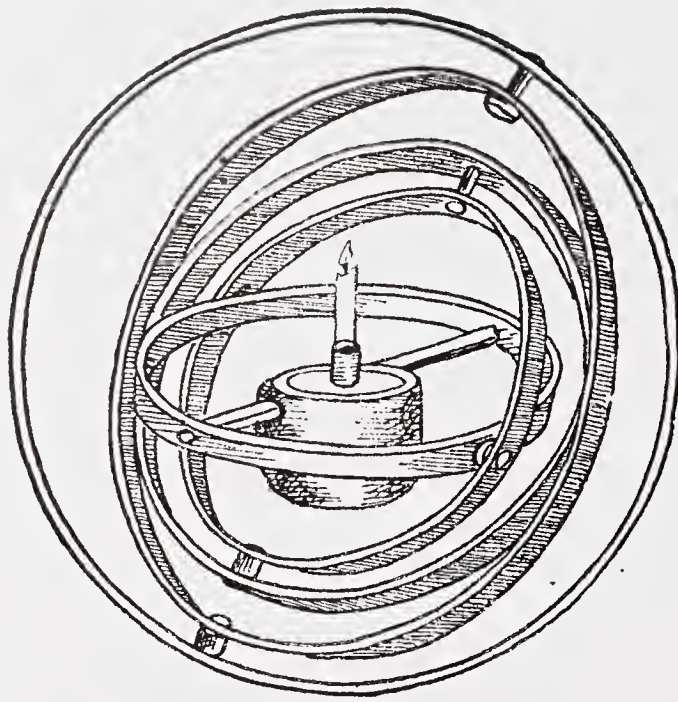
Apart from serving as centres of culture, the temples were also used to house pilgrims and *sadhus*. While the *Gram Panchayat* met elsewhere, the *Dharma Panchayat* and the religious schools were conducted in temples. Surrounding the temples were gardens which abounded with parrots, peacocks and deer. In the *pushkarini* or temple pond, fish, turtles and the swans pleased the eye of the beholder.

It was around the temple that the whole life of the community revolved. On temple walls were often painted mythological incidents. The carvings on the ceiling, columns, the wooden doors and frames were artistic masterpieces. In short, the temple was the



12. A rolling lamp with gyroscope contrivance. Diameter 16 cm.





13. A lamp inside the sphere

confluence of sculptural, musical, literary and other artistic talents. Was it not very proper, then, that lamps lighting such temples should reflect the best of craftsmanship?

It is also essential to make a brief survey of the secular use of lamps in our country. The excavations at Mohenjo-Daro have conclusively shown the prevalence of street lights more than five thousand years ago. There used to be a *deepa-stambha* along each main street of a town and small lights over the main gates of houses.

The lamps for common household use were simple or elaborate depending upon the status of the householder. Later, the forecourt of houses was graced by a *vrindavana*. The custom of lighting a little lamp at dusk by the *vrindavana* still prevails. The *vrindavana* lamp in the houses of the rich had brass frames (f. 8) with decorated perforations to serve the dual purpose of allowing the light out and protecting it from wind and rain. The evening lamps have also another significance. Dusk is the auspicious time when the return of grazing cattle is expected. The grazing cow brings with her Goddess Lakshmi. It is, therefore, apt that both should be welcomed with a lamp.

Every room and parlour in the house had light. The



14. Illustration of a lamp from a Maratha Painting on glass. c. 1775

parlour was graced by a *samai*. The word *samai* is derived from the Persian *sama*, which means a lamp. The pedestal of the *samai*, used to be of many different types. The lamp was so arranged that it could hold a number of wicks. To keep off the moths, the lamp had a cover, the top of which was decorated with a peacock, elephant or serpent. The workmanship was of high quality (f. 57). As on the cover, so on the pedestal we find a parrot perched (f. 50). Sometimes on the rim of the lamp, or occasionally on the shoulder or the armlet or the *kankana* of the lady with a lamp, one finds a parrot perched comfortably (f. 72). Some *samais* take the shape of famous temples in miniature (f. 44). Such lamps are found in profusion in Nepal. Some of the more common patterns are pyramidal temple tops, four lions guarding the four corners, star lamps, *Ganesha* lamps or the parapet of the temple adorned with a chain of *peepal* leaves. Hanging lamps also are fashioned in similar patterns.

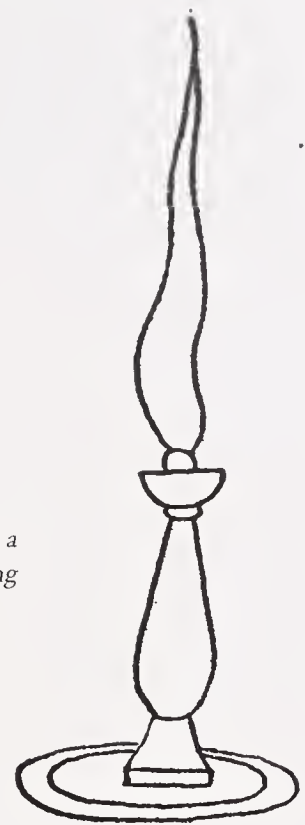
The niches adjoining the door-lintels of most of the larger houses were used for the *Ganesha* lamp or the *Gajalakshmi* lamp (f. 9, 76). Moreover, every room of the house had a decorated niche (f. 69) reserved for lamps. Such lamps were usually mounted on an elephant (f. 107, 110), horse or bull (f. 109). Occasionally the lamp resembled a feminine form,

usually in the standing pose (f. 68) holding the lamp in either of the hands or in both (f. 121). Not infrequently the lady with the lamp was shown in a beautiful dance *mudra*. A siphon arrangement was sometimes introduced in the construction of the *deepangana* (f. 65) to carry the oil to the wick. The region to which the lamp-maker belonged can be inferred from the hair style, dress and make up of the feminine figure. The architectural design also provides a clue to the place of origin of the lamp. Architecture from every corner of India is represented in the lamp tradition.

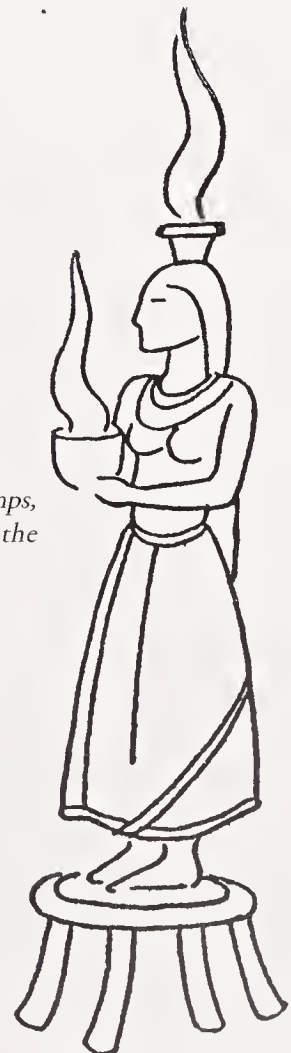
The elephant and the lion seem to vie with each other for the top place on the lamp-stand, even as they do in the forests. In some lamps two elephants in ceremonial finery form the stand, topped by a raging lion. Sometimes an elaborately decorated elephant is seen in a saluting pose with a peacock forming the lamp (f. 110). Now and then one comes across a little pilot lamp held in the trunk of the elephant, with the main lamp mounted on the back in the form of *Ganesha* or a goddess (f. 73. 75). Two usual variations of the elephant theme are a small *Gaja-deepa* (f. 115) with a chain and a siphon-system and a large-sized siphonic lamp with thirty-six lights. I have even seen a beautiful lamp depicting a flock of deer on the run.

The chain lamp, too, was fashioned in many varieties. Birds and beasts found favour with the artisan (f. 83, 85, 91) in conformity with the Indian tradition. The lamps of this type were designed to be hung from arches above the doors or windows and from roof-eaves projecting into the courtyard. They were also extensively used to decorate assembly-halls. A speciality of this type is the intricate arrangement for the flow of oil to wick, through a siphon from a concealed storing place. A lamp of peahen design depicts a string of different musical instruments. One might surmise that this must have been worked out in deference to the wishes of a great musician. Perhaps the lamp reminded him that in his ventures into the world of music he should maintain a flame-like purity of purpose. Or was it

15. A lamp from a  
Rajasthani painting



16. A maid with two lamps,  
from a painting of the  
Rajasthani School  
c. 1760







17. Vishnu Deepa. On the disc is a representation of Vishnu with a seven-hooded cobra behind him. Height 12 cm. 19th century, Nepal





designed in order to rekindle the spark in a master-genius among them—a likely token from a disciple or an unknown admirer? A girl in a wandering group of acrobats must have caught an artist's fancy, and the result is a delightful chain lamp with a figurine (f. 11). Similarly, the representation of dance *mudras* shows the relationship of the art of lamp-making to another fine art.

The lamps made in northern India during the last few centuries clearly show Mughal influence. In all areas where the Mughals' sway extended can be found a type of lamp, mainly of brass, with the surface perforated in intricate geometrical patterns. Every such lamp has a tower or dome at the top. When hung up at night, the lighted wick projects its pattern of light and shade on the floor and the walls. A famous example is the lamp made for *Noorunnisa*, the Queen of Light showing a palace-in-the lake motif.

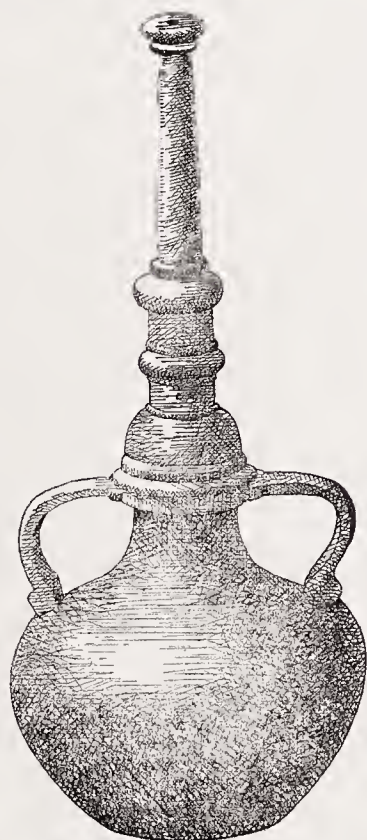
In *harems* of the Mughal period it was the practice, on summer nights, to have small baths filled with scented water. The brim of the bath would be

embellished with little lamps, and the lamps themselves had silken veils, as though they competed with the muslin-clad beauties waiting on the edge of the bath. The gaiety of the entire scene was heightened when the veiled damsels played with lamplets which were freely thrown about as in a ball game. As can be guessed, these little lamps were of gyroscopic contraption.

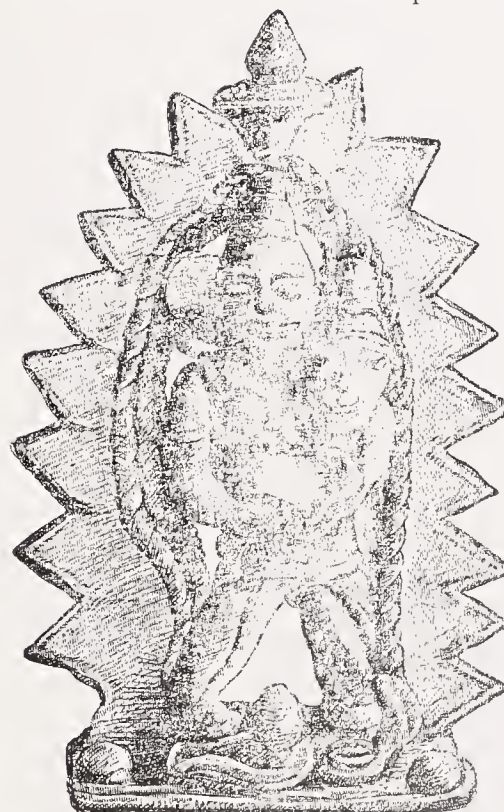
Akbar held that it was a sin not to worship fire and light. Abul Fazl records in *Ain-e-Akbari* that Akbar believed that "every flame is derived from the fountain of Divine Light, i.e., the Sun, and bears the impression of its holy essence. The flame of a light is the torch of God's sovereignty."

A white stone was to generate the pure fire for Akbar's court and for one whole year flames would be kindled from the master fire. Besides, there were flambeaux which were so placed everywhere that the day of the month and the phase of the moon were indicated by the height of the flame.

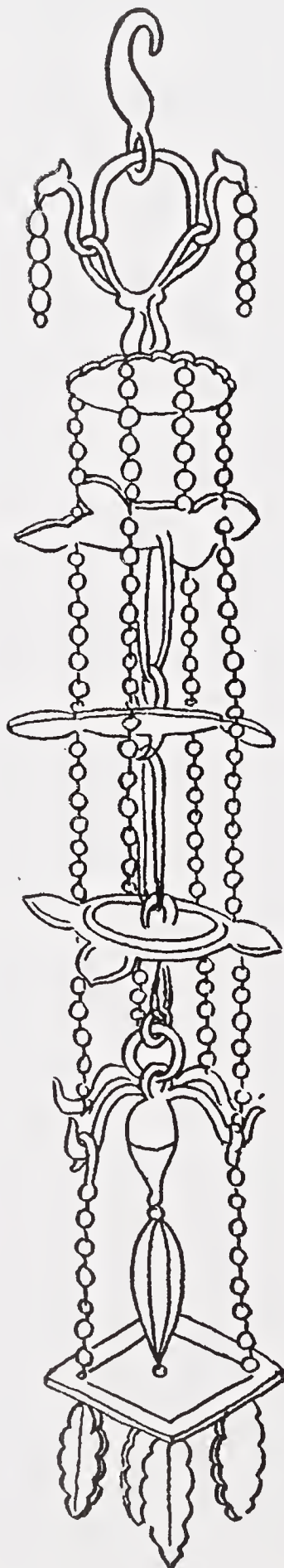
When the Emperor was on tour, the imperial tent was marked out with a 120-foot pole. It was held



18. An oil container with which a flambeau is fed. Height 26 cm. 16th century, Deccan



19. An Adivasi lamp showing *Kapalishwar*, a form of Shiva. At the base a 'linga' and a cobra can be seen. Height 11 cm. 15th century, Deccan



20. An elaborate hanging lamp made of iron. Gond tribesmen light such lamps at 'Diwali'

upright by sixteen guy ropes. The pole supported a high kite-lamp.

Then there was a *jaher-mohra* which, as the name indicates, was used to detect poisonous stuff in the imperial meal. The imperial household always had one such lamp.

The traditional lamps and lights of India have existed in many shapes and taken on many names. The *akasha-deepa* is hung high up during the Festival of Lights. In marriage rituals, a lamp with a little handle is placed in a reed-work casket. This is the lamp of beauty and the lamp of good omen which is held high above the young couple to the accompaniment of the benediction: "May your married life be of good light and joy." On some occasions flour-lamps are used, as for example on Friday in the month of *Shravana*. Dough-lamps are especially used for worship, and the *Amavasya* of the month of *Ashadha* is reserved for paying homage to all the lamps that are used in the house throughout the year. This is literally "the Night of the Lamp". In every auspicious celebration a lamp is lighted and kept bright to serve as a celestial spectator. It is named *sakshi-deepa*, "The witness".

The lamp comes into its own during the Festival of Lights, *Deepavali* or *Diwali*, which is celebrated throughout the country. *Deepavali* is a four-day festival. On the third day, Lakshmi, the Goddess of Wealth, is worshipped, and with her the Goddess of Enlightenment, *Deepa-Lakshmi*. Every type of lamp finds a place in this Festival. *Deepavali* is a great occasion for family reunions. The mother bestows her blessings upon the children, the sister conveys her good wishes to her brothers and the bride shares her good fortune with the husband. Every dear one is greeted with a light in the hand and with light in the eyes.

The first nine nights of the Indian calendar year and the nine nights in *Aswin* preceding *Dasara* are days of rejoicing in every household. The *nānda-deepa* forms the centre of the various functions and activities during these days.



In bygone days it was with a lamp that the brave one going off to the battlefield was given a send-off. A lamp was also on hand to welcome home the triumphant warrior. When Mahatma Gandhi set out on his historic Dandi March, he was greeted at every village on the way by women with prayer-lamps.

*Deepa-dāna*, gift of lamps, has deep roots in the Indian tradition. It is regarded as facilitating the pilgrim's way to the higher world. The *deepa-dana* ceremony is performed before sunrise after a ceremonial bath. The intercalary month is believed to be auspicious for such gifts and is therefore, called the best month—*purushottama-māsa*. The donated lamp guides the *prana* in its flight away from the earthly prison. It is also believed that *Yama*, the God of Death, is pacified when a lamp is offered to him in humility.

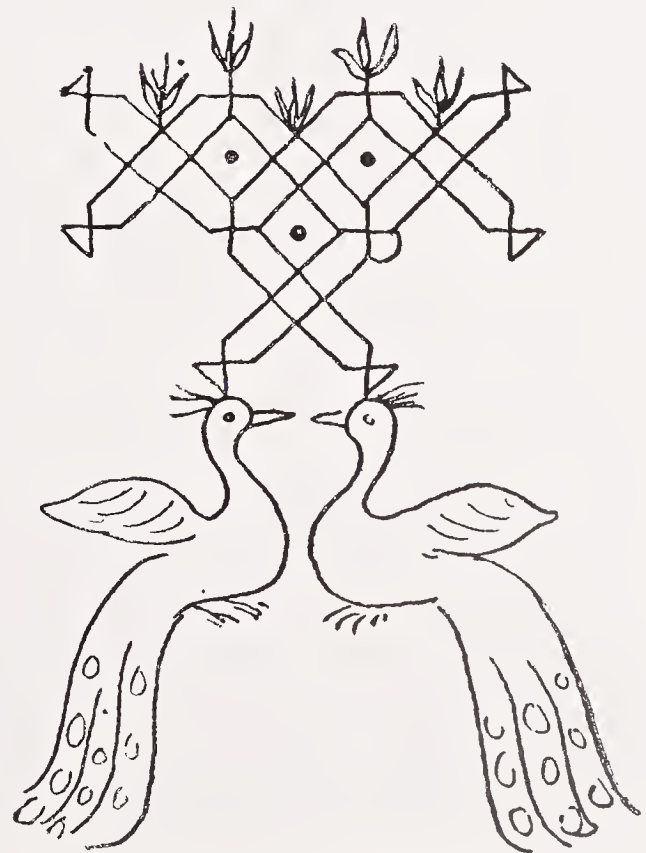
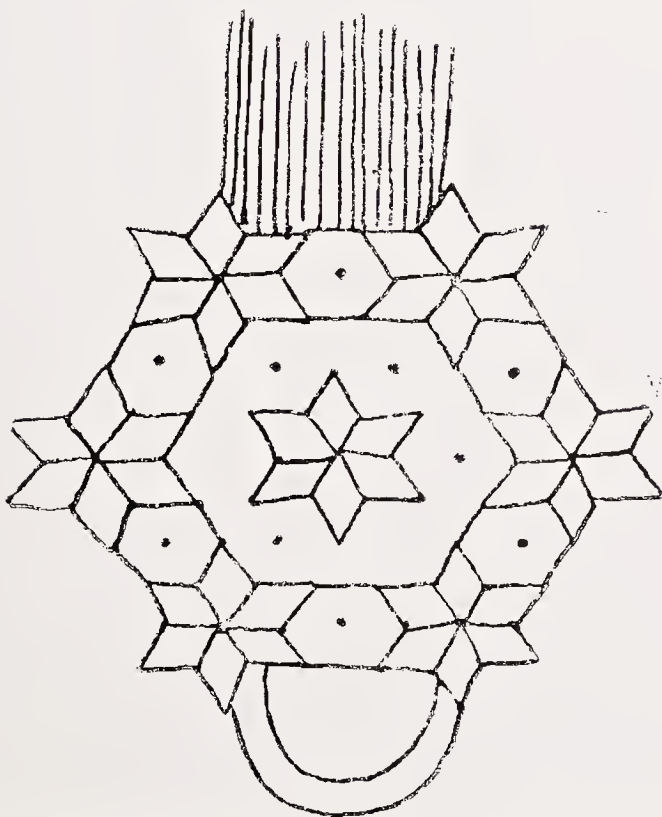
In southern India there are sixteen traditional ways of *deepa-dāna*. A *tāmra-patra* of the Cholas (c. 1225 A.D.) records how cows were given away so that the *ghee* made from their milk should be available for

keeping the *nanda-deepa* burning. The donor also made provision for the proper feeding of the cows.

Pilgrims who visit holy places on the rivers make it a point after sunset to light a lamp and let it float down the river in a bowl made of a dry leaf. Such lamps have flower-shaped wicks and are fed with *ghee*. The lamps carried on the bosom of the dark waters look like stars in the sky.

The idea of dancing lamps has been developed in the *Braja* region around Mathura in Uttar Pradesh. After the Holi celebrations every year, an exquisite folk dance called *Charakala* is to be witnessed in the area for three days. A wooden cage houses a lamp. The cage itself is placed on the top of a *kalasa*. The urn is taken up by a belle chosen for the task well in advance. She takes dancing lessons for a year prior to the dance. People from miles around flock to see the thrilling spectacle. With the urn-lamp on her head and two lamps in the hands, the girl who is dressed in jewels and finery, executes graceful

21 & 22 Rangoli designs. Lamps are kept at spots indicated by dots



movements. The belief is that, the lamp dance is a ritual which hastens the arrival of spring.

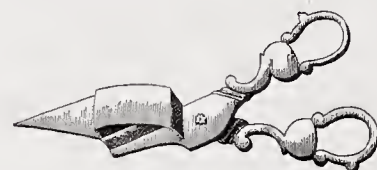
Punjab has its own lamp dance, called *Jago*, which is performed at marriages. A coloured urn is bedecked with flowers and its mouth is sealed with wheat flour. On it are placed pentangular lamps. A *suvasini* from the bridegroom's entourage then lifts it up on her head. Women from the bride's side gather around her and dance and sing. Gujarat too has its lamp dance, the famous *Garba*. In this dance, girls carrying coloured earthen pots on their head weave intricate patterns. These pots are perforated, and each pot has a lamp inside it. There are similar traditional dances in other parts of the country.

From the entry into the world, of every human being, to his exit, the lamp stands guard, heightening the solemnity of the occasion, be it anniversary,

initiation or holy wedlock. The *Kamasutras*, which prescribe such things as the cosmetics and decorations to be used on the night of couple's coming together, also describes how the bridal chamber should be suffused in soft and tranquillising glow.

The Indian medical science tells us that in the room where a child is born the lamp should be so placed that the light should be reflected from the mother's face on to the child's, 'even as the Earth lends the Moon, light borrowed from the Sun'.

The unending cycle of the seasons is a part of the great mystery of the Universe that has ever awed the human mind. Man has expressed this gratitude for whatever glimpse nature vouchsafes him or itself by invoking the lamp to his aid. Thus, we welcome with a



23. A pair of scissors used to put out stand-lamps. Height 18 cm. 18th century, Deccan



lamp the ox and the plough, the cart and the grain that is brought home in it. We worship the tools of our trade with the aid of a lamp. Since the dawn of consciousness, man has prayed to his Maker for the boon of health, long life and happy children. Sometimes his prayer bears fruit, and the votary hurries to the temple to offer a specially prepared lamp saying.

इदं ज्योतिः अमृतं मर्त्येषु

*(this is the light immortal amongst mortals)*

This avowal lamp often bears the supplicatory *mudra*. Among aboriginal people with their totems and taboos, the idea of avowal is all-pervasive. Apart from the main events in his life the aboriginal feels called upon to vow to his God and invite His intercession on several occasions. If his chicken is diseased or his buffalo dries up, the aboriginal takes his prayer to his deity. And if He is pleased to set

things right then a lamb is sacrificed and a lamp lighted unto Him. At the height of desperation the devotee promises Him his own head in sacrifice. The promise is kept including an earthen head in the lamp to be offered to the deity. The lamps offered by the aboriginal are out of the ordinary. Even as his prayer comes from the heart, his offering comes from his own hands. The aboriginal lamp is crude but beautiful with the beauty of passion. Specially beautiful are the tribal lamps lit at the Festival of Lights. The Adivasi is devoted to lights. The mother of the house lights lamps made of iron, not of clay. There are also lamps of rice dough with which the tribal settlement is all aglow. Sometimes one sees lamps in flights of four or five. One also comes across tribal lamps resembling a horse, elephant or



24. A chain lamp in the shape of a peacock.  
16 cm. 18th century, Rajasthan



peacock. These are used in initiation ceremonies and other rites of the tribe, and are placed before icons. Considering the crude state of tribal pottery, these lamps are very impressive. Some of the most interesting specimen are to be seen at the marriage ceremonies among the Gonds of Madhya Pradesh. A five-foot pole in the centre shows a spotted human figure in red or blue with *cowries* for the eyes. At the middle of the pole are placed four lamps. Sometimes these iron poles carry images of spotted deer or a human doll and small iron lamps. The *Soura* tribe has a special magic lamp. One side of it shows a peacock which represents death, and the other shows two figures which stand for the dead spirits of the *Soura* priestesses.

In every village, after dark, children assemble around their grandmother or grandfather in the courtyard which is lit by the docile *vrindavana* lamp. And in that quiet setting wondrous tales are unfolded. At some stage of the story, comes in the lamp to perform some miracle. There is no end to the variations of this theme. Likewise, myriad are the proverbs, idioms and axioms centring on the lamp in Sanskrit and other Indian languages. For instance:

दीपोवातभयान्तीतः कामिन्या वसनान्तरे ।  
दृष्ट्वा तु कुचसौंदर्यं शिरः कम्पयते मुहुः ।

Which can be paraphrased as:

***“When a young lass goes out to meet her beloved, a little lamp keeps her company. That it might not be unduly disturbed by the wind, the woman covers it with the end of the garment but the lamp, watching from close range the beauty of her breast, is thrilled and begins to quiver.”***

A bride in a Konkan village tells her friends of the time when the two returned late at night from the mountain and when she prepared a lamp out of the *ketaki* flower to see the path:

डोंगरासून येताना जाली रात,  
केतकीच्या फुलामधि पेटवली वात ।

Hindi literature abounds in *pahelis* or riddles about the lamp. One such is the following:

एक नार ने अचरज किया,  
सांप मार पिंजरे में दिया ।  
जो जो सांप तालको खाए  
सूखे ताल सांप मर जाए ।

***(A dead serpent in a tank began sucking up the water and ended its own life.)***

In Gujarati:

एक जनावर इ तूं छे:  
पुछडे पानी पीतूं छे ॥

***(Now what is that animal which drinks with tail ?)***

The answer of course is the lamp.

As in classical and folk literature, so in sculpture, the lamp is a favourite theme. We find a number of lamp carvings in ancient Amaravati, Maharashtra and in far-away Borobudur, Cambodia. The lamp which lighted the face of Mahamaya, the Buddha's mother, is accorded an honoured place in Buddhist mythology. The incident is immortalised in stone and is known as 'the dream scene'.

The ornamentation at the Borobudar stupa is patterned after a variety of musical instruments, thrones, chariots and any number of lamps and utensils used for worship. All these motifs recall Indian prototypes, particularly of the *Pallava* and *Chalukya* period.

In the seventeenth and eighteenth century depictions of Mughal, Rajput, Kangra and Maratha life, we find ceiling lamps, column lamps and parlour lamps of great beauty and variety. So too in wall-painting, glass-painting and illuminated manuscripts. (f. 14, 15, 16).

Floor-designs form a very important part of our rural culture. Simple and complex floor designs are laid in white stone powder every morning in front of the entrance and in the courtyard of the house. (f. 21 and 22 ). The skill of the women is seen especially during Deepavali. These designs are methodically and skilfully inlaid with lamp-patterns. The sacred *kumkum* itself is a symbol of the flame.

In the astrological science too, the best of *kundalinis* is said to be like the tip of the flame. It is in this form that the *Yogashastra* sees the divine influence in a *kundalini*.

There are many legends about the *Deepak raga* in classical music. It is said that when it is correctly and artistically unfolded the raga lights a flame in the heart of the audience. The court musician of the Mughal Emperor Akbar, Tansen is credited by popular legend with having performed the miracle of lighting all the lamps in Akbar's audience hall by singing this raga.

There used to be a whole system of reading omens from the shape and colours of the flame and the tip. A Sanskrit text, *Purushottama-Māhātmya*, says :

रुक्षैर्लक्ष्मीविनाशः स्यात् श्वेतैरन्नक्षयो भवेत् ।  
अतिरक्तेषु युद्धानि, मृत्युः कृष्णशिखांषु च ।

*(Drying-up flames indicate the destruction of wealth ; white flames Indicate the waste of sustenance; flames that are very red indicate wars, and black flames indicate death.)*

Coloured tips were the omen of dangers such as loss of wealth and food, of wars and death. There were conventions in regard to the direction in which the tip should tend. It was considered inauspicious if the lamp was put out by the breeze or if it slipped from the hand. It was not to be blown out. It was to be 'sent off' or 'pacified' with a wave of the hand or the end of a garment. The latter convention is still followed all over India.

The *Deepa-Shastra* lays down the right method to light the lamp. It also prescribes how and when oil or *ghee* is to be used. It says : "Ghee from cow's milk is the best. In its absence use oil of mustard. The wick should be of *deva-kapas* (cotton), should be hand-made and should have seven fibres." According to these rules, a specially designed oil-can is to be used to replenish oil in the lamp and a special pair of tongs to adjust the wick or to brush off soot (f. 23,104, 105). The tip of the flame should be clean and gracefully spread over.

In few other countries could there be such a wealth of imagery and symbolism built around the lamp. The lamps in use at present can be broadly classified as belonging to five main cults : *Saiva* (f. 66), *Vaishnava*, *Ganapatya* (f. 9), *Soura* and *Shākta* (f.19). In the *Saiva* lamps the forms of *Salunka*, *Nandi*, *Naga* and sometimes *Kirtimukha* predominate. The *Vaishnava* lamps display the chief emblems connected with *Vishnu*, namely, *Sankha*, *Chakra*, *Gada*, *Padma*, *Garuda* and *Tripundra*. As *Lakshmi* is the chief goddess of the *Vaishnavas*, we find excellent craftsmanship lavished on the *Gajalakshmi* lamps. Lamps of the *Ganapatya* cult mostly represent *Ganesha* as also *Gaja*, *Mushaka*, *Sarpa*, *Sivalinga*, *Riddhi* and *Siddhi*. The *Souras* are Sun-worshippers. Their lamps are magnificent like the Sun Temple at Konarak in Orissa. The *Shaktas* worship such manifestations of *Shakti* as *Kala-Bhairav*, *Kalpanta-Bhairav*, *Kali* and *Bhairavi*. Sadhus of the *hathayogi* persuasion carry a special lamp made of sea-shell.

Twenty-five centuries ago Gautama Buddha preached; "Oh, Monks ! Human life is like a flame of the lamp and during this transitory life we should emulate the calm lamp. We want to attain immortality and Nirvana like the flame that goes out and mingles with eternity. There is no reincarnation for such a flame of life."

निब्बति धीरा यथायम पदीपो ।

*(Suttanipata 235)*

Indian civilisation has been built around the worship of the sun, fire and lamp. All foreign travellers in the past have made repeated references to the Indian lamp and the people's reverence for it. Without these three symbols of light and life all would be darkness and ignorance.

*O lamp, form of the Supreme Spirit, Everlasting light of lights, protect me from perdition.*

*I salute thee.*

भो दीप ! ब्रह्मरूपस्त्वं ज्योतिषां ज्योतिरक्षयः ।

त्राहि मां निरयात् घोरात् दीपज्योतिर्नमोऽस्तु ते ॥

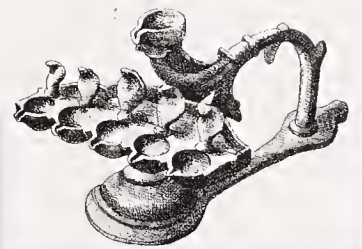




25. Deepa Lakshmi on an elephant, with a pilot lamp in the trunk and a Pancharati on its back. The crown of the Deepa Lakshmi is fashioned as a cobra head for holding incense sticks. Height 15 cm. 18th century, Karnataka

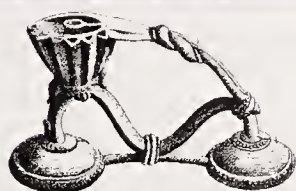


# ĀRATI LAMPS



26. A votive lamp with a pilot lamp at top and serpent hoods behind the bowls. Height 14 cm. 17th century, Deccan

28. A votive lamp from South India. Height 9 cm. 17th century







27. Naga Kumbha Deepa, a lamp with the motifs of a pot and a serpent. Height 19 cm. 18th century, Nepal



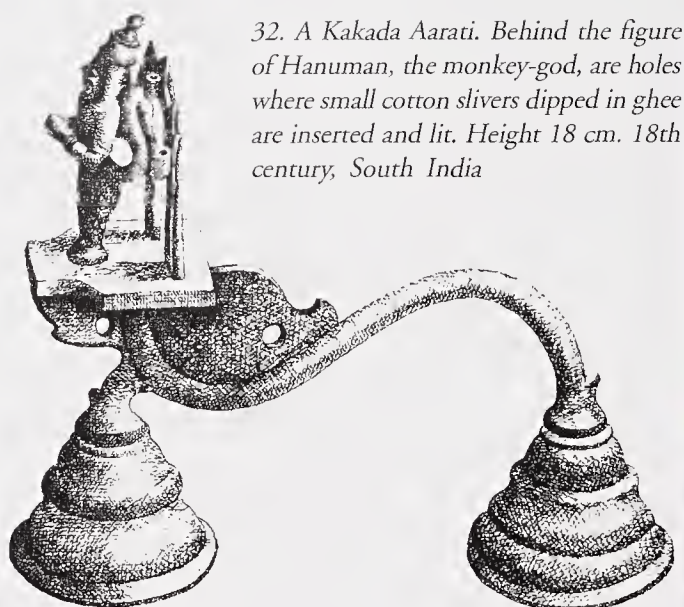




29. Mayoora Dhuparati. A votive lamp in the shape of a peacock. It has five lampbowls, and the body acts as a container for incense. Scented sticks can be stuck in the raised holder on the plumage. Height 25 cm, 18th century, Andhra







32. A Kakada Aarati. Behind the figure of Hanuman, the monkey-god, are holes where small cotton slivers dipped in ghee are inserted and lit. Height 18 cm. 18th century, South India



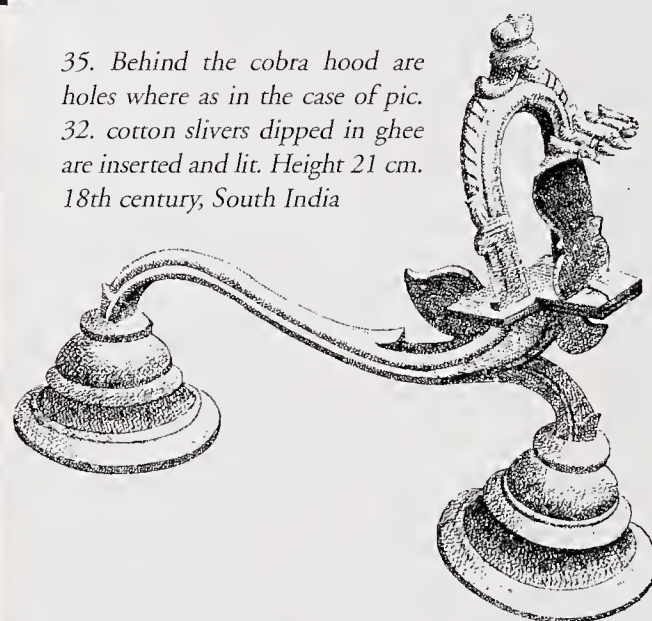
30. A lamp from Deccan with space for five wicks and a special bowl for the burning of camphor. Height 13 cm. 18th century



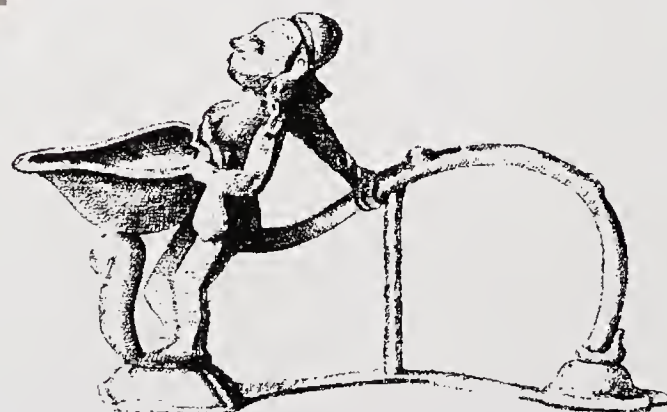
33. A large votive lamp of many wicks 18th century, South India



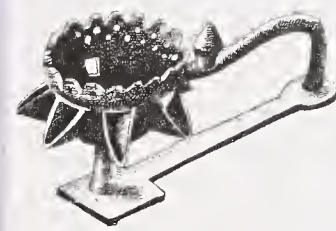
35. Behind the cobra hood are holes where as in the case of pic. 32. cotton slivers dipped in ghee are inserted and lit. Height 21 cm. 18th century, South India



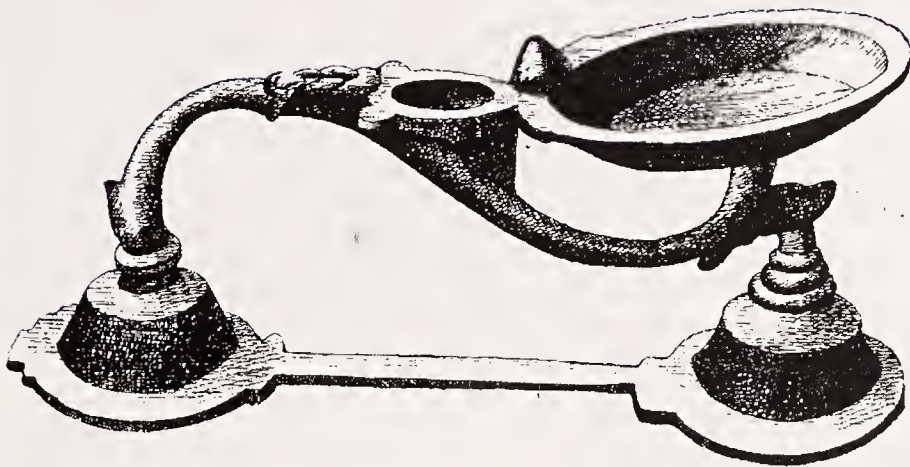
31. A folk votive lamp. Height 8 cm. 17th century, Deccan







34. A votive lamp of the 17th century from South India, Height 6 cm.

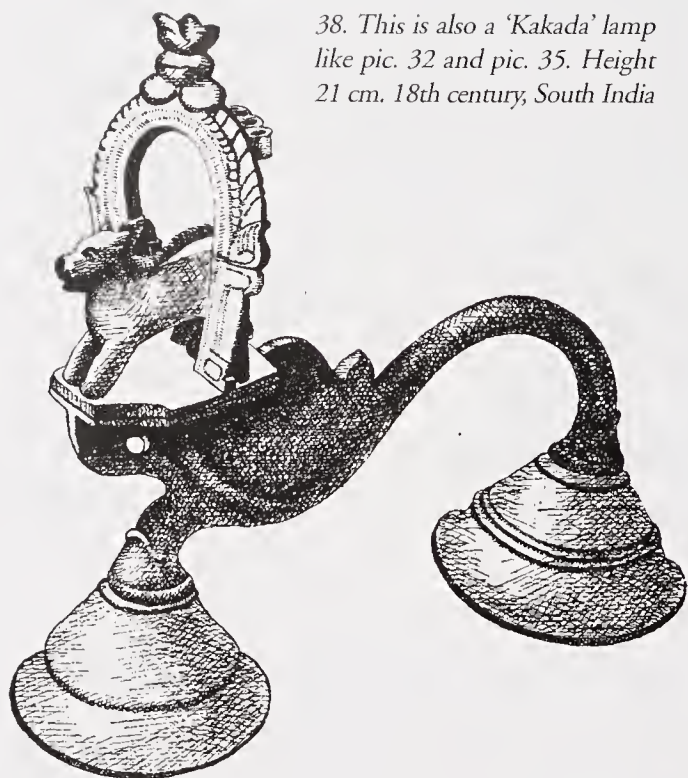


36. A lamp with a bowl for burning camphor. Height 9 cm. 18th century, Deccan

37. Note the serpent, the bull (Nandi) and the 'linga'. Height 11 cm. 17th century, Deccan







38. This is also a 'Kakada' lamp like pic. 32 and pic. 35. Height 21 cm. 18th century, South India



40. The curve of the dragon in this lamp is balanced by the bulge and mass of the bowl. Height 18 cm. 19th century, Nepal



41. This Pancharati depicts a pair of parrots. Height 18 cm. 17th century, Deccan



39. Side view of the lamp shown in pic. 33. A bird is depicted resting on the handle



# STANDING LAMPS



42. A standing lamp of the 19th century from Nepal. Height 21cm.





43. A temple is depicted at the top of this lamp. Height 59 cm. 18th century, Nepal



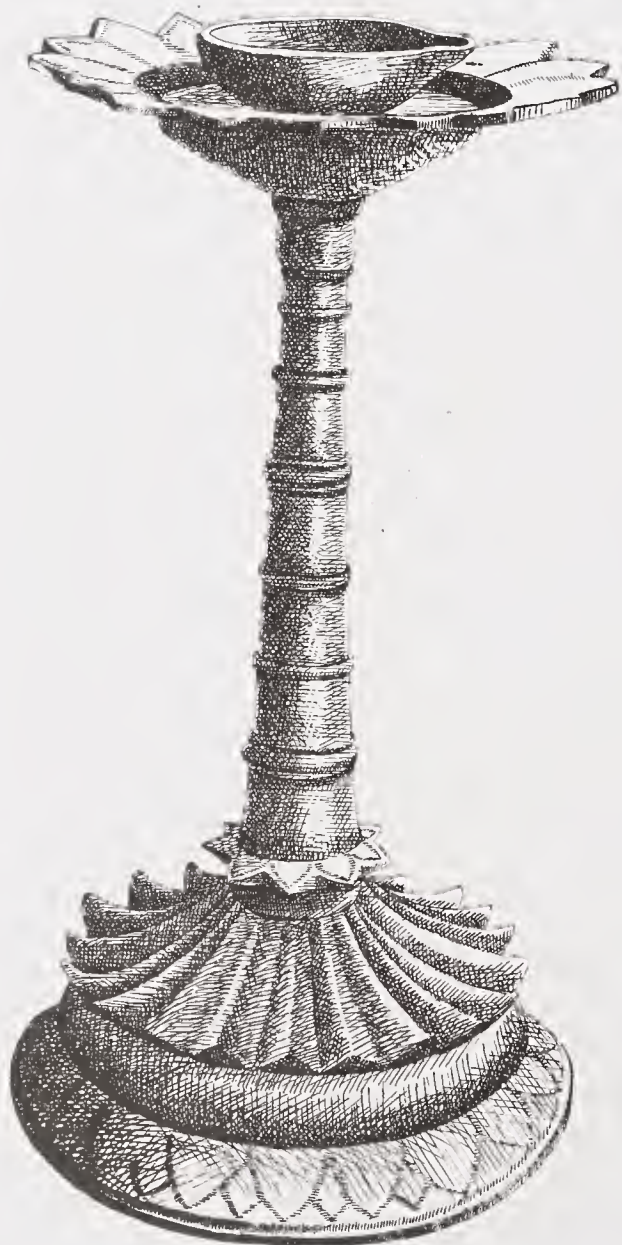




44. Another lamp in the form of a miniature temple.  
Height 62 cm. 18th century, Nepal







46. An elegant stand lamp from Bengal.  
Height 25 cm. 18th century



45. A peacock-shaped standing lamp with  
siphonic arrangement. It is 60 cm. high  
and is from Gujarat, 18th century





48. A wooden stand supporting a small lamp. Height 36 cm. 19th century, South India



47. A peacock is depicted as holding a bowl with a cobra head. Height 26 cm. 17th century, Deccan







49. Guru-Sishya Deepa. A Stand lamp used in 'gurukulas' when the teacher imparted instruction to the novice. Height 97 cm. 17th century, South India



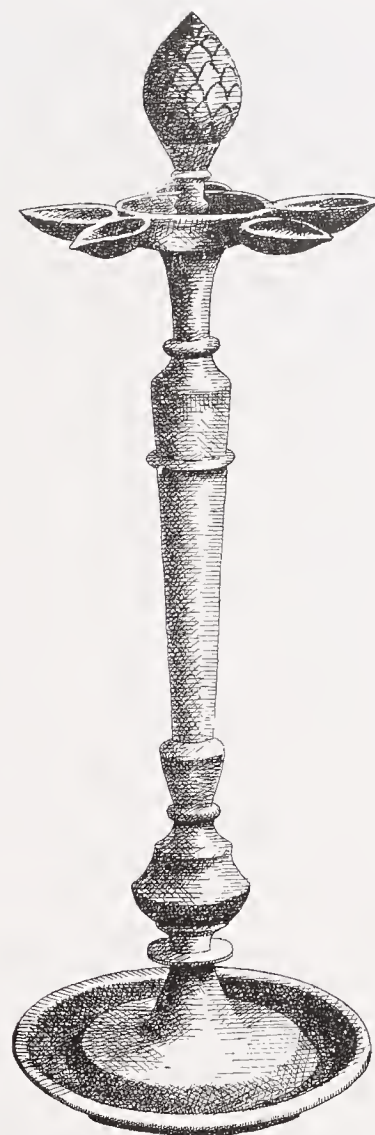
50. A handsome lamp showing a parrot climbing up the stand. Height 130 cm. 17th century, Deccan.







51. A votive lamp from Kerala with fire bowls. Height 103 cm. 17th century.



52. Five peacocks are shown at dance on this branching stand-lamp of the 19th century. Height 110 cm. Deccan.



53. The figure of a swan tops this lamp from South India. Height 75 cm. 17th century







54. A lamp with five bowls at varying levels and a bird on the top. Height 79 cm. 19th century, Gujarat



55. A lamp in the shape of a small flowering plant







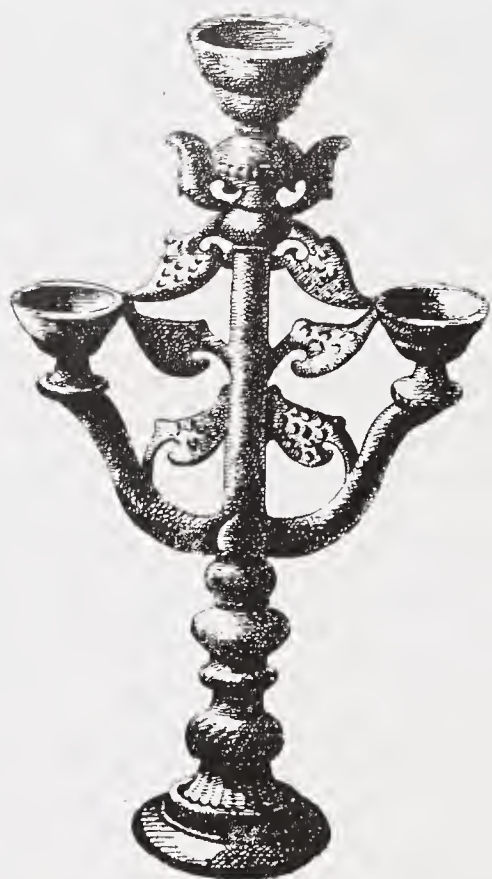
56. A portable lamp-stand with five wicks. Height 28 cm. 17th century, Andhra



57. A 17th century votive lamp from the Deccan. Height 63 cm.







58. A stand-lamp for lighting camphor, Height 22 cm. 19th century, Nepal



59. An exquisitely carved wrought lamp from Nepal. Height 55 cm. 18th century



60. A solid brass votive lamp or 'Samayee.' Height 65 cm. 17th century, Deccan





# DEEPA LAKSHMI



61. Deepa Lakshmi standing on an elephant with the lamp bowl in her hand and a hooded cobra protecting her. Height 43 cm. 18th century, Deccan







63. A Ganesha lamp of the standing variety. The tip of the wick is to peep out of the mouth of the mouse as in pic. 9. Height 42 cm. 18th century, Nepal





62. Deepa Lakshmi from Gujarat. Height 15 cm. 17th century





64. Deepa Lakshmi from the Andhra region. Height 31 cm. 18th century.

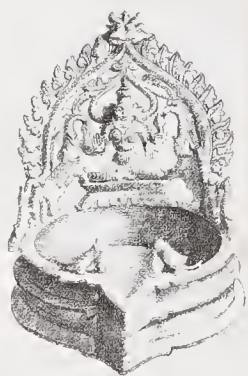




65. Another graceful Deepa Lakshmi, a tribute to the craftsman's skill. The bowl is in the left hand and the oil flows to it by siphonic arrangement. Height 25 cm. 17th century, Deccan







69. Gajalakshmi lamp with parrots on the rim of the bowl. Height 19 cm. 19th century, South India





66. Deepa Lakshmi figure,  
with the 'linga' on her head.  
Height 13 cm. 17th century,  
Deccan







70. Deepa Lakshmi from the Andhra region, Height 19 cm. 17th century



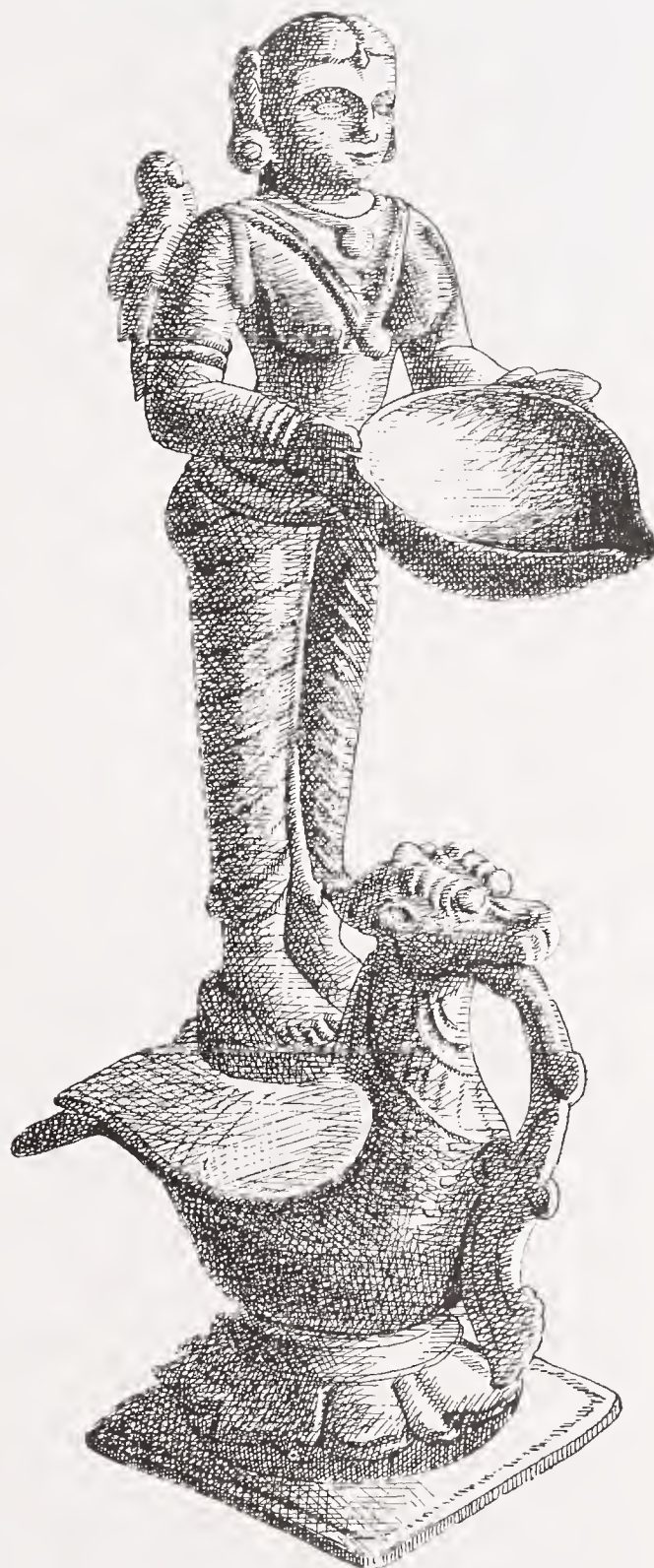
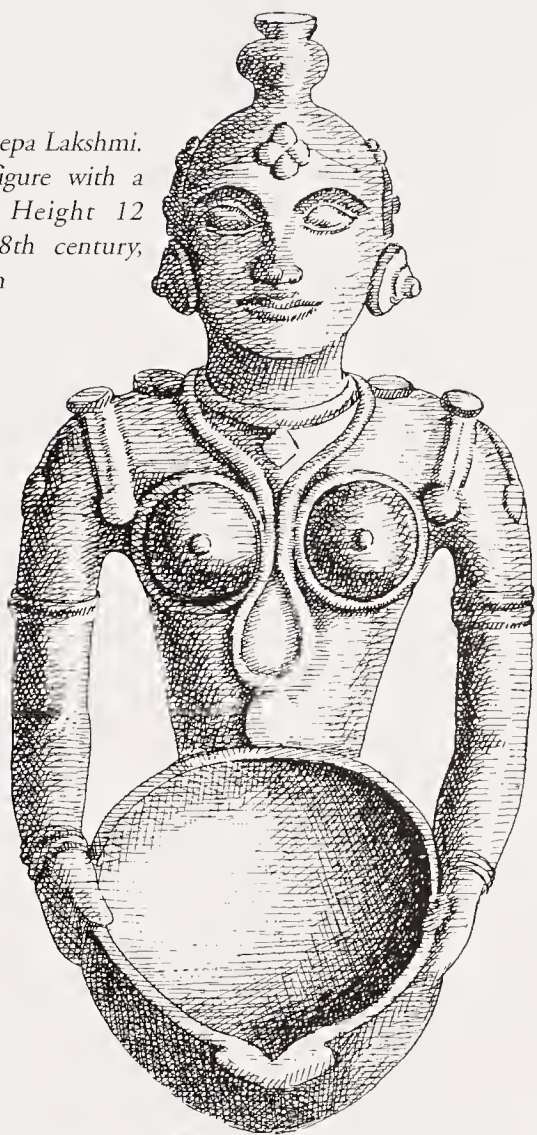
68. Deepa Lakshmi depicted as a maiden in Rajasthani costume. Height 15 cm. 17th century, Rajasthan



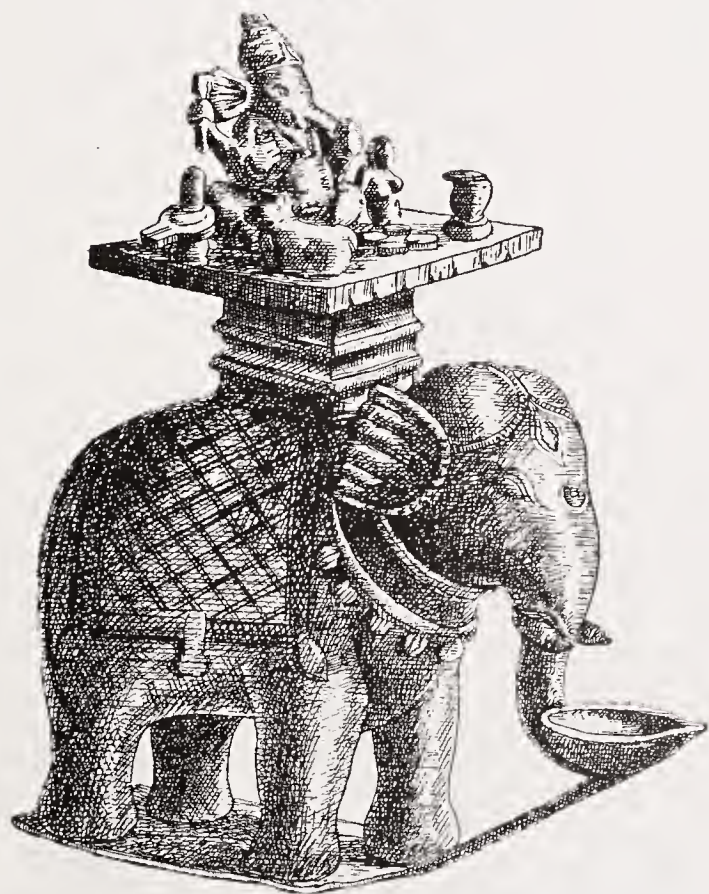
67. Deepa Lakshmi with a conch. The oil held in the body of the image flows to the bowl through the conch. Height 40 cm. 18th century, Deccan



71. Deepa Lakshmi.  
Half figure with a  
bowl. Height 12  
cm. 18th century,  
Deccan



72. Deepa Lakshmi stands on a bird  
which has a lion's head. A parrot is  
perched on her shoulder. Height 27  
cm. 17th century, South India



73. Ganesha rides an elephant, surrounded  
by Shivalinga, Nandi and a cobra. The  
elephant holds a pilot lamp in its trunk.  
Height 14 cm. 17th century, Deccan



74. A Gajalakshmi lamp. Height  
83 cm. 18th century, Gujarat







75. A Deepa Lakshmi on an elephant with a pilot lamp in her hand. Around the elephant are six bowls for burning camphor. Height 32 cm. 16th century, Gujarat



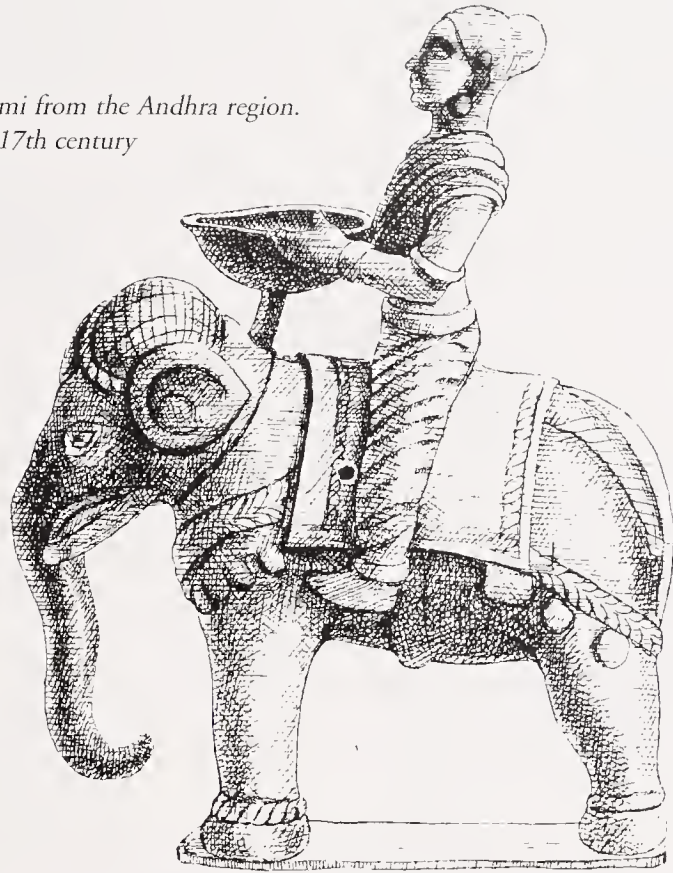




77. A deity riding on an elephant. Height 30 cm. 18th century, Gujarat



76. Gaja Lakshmi from the Andhra region.  
Height 14 cm. 17th century



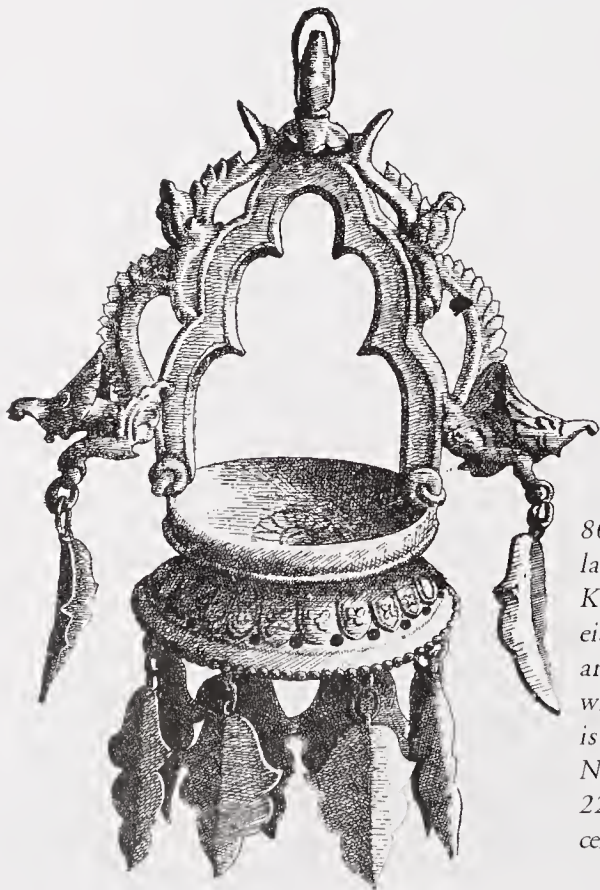
78. A Gaja-Gouri lamp of Jain origin.  
Height 10 cm. 17th century, Gujarat





# CHAIN LAMPS

79. Shakti, consort of Shiva, is represented on this chain lamp. The lotus base holds oil and wicks



80. A hanging lamp with Kirtimukhas on either side of the arched handle, whose shape is peculiarly Nepalese. Height 22 cm, 18th century

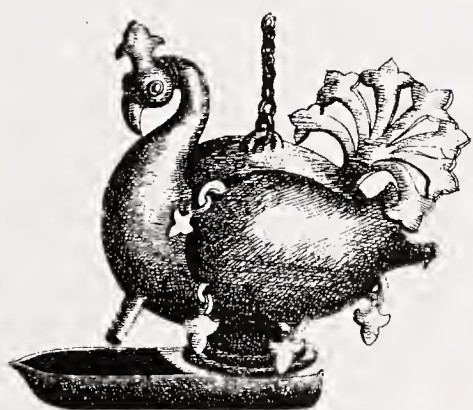


84. A sparrow-shaped lamp from Central India. Height 11 cm. 18th century





90. A beautiful parrot lamp.  
Height 15 cm. 18th century,  
Gujarat



87. A chain lamp from Rajasthan,  
resembling a peahen. 18th century



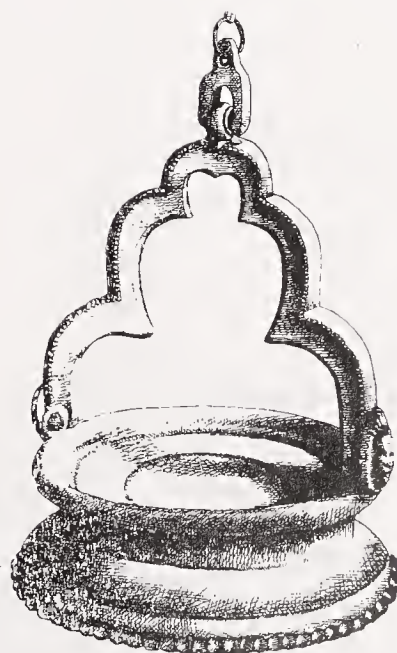
86. A lamp moulded in the  
shapes of a bird and a conch-  
shell. Height 16 cm. 17th  
century, South India



83. A folk-design  
chain lamp. The head  
holds the wick and the  
body contains oil.  
Height 18 cm. 18th  
century, Orissa



82. Another  
pendant lamp  
with a compli-  
cated Kirtimukha  
design. Height 24  
cm. 18th century,  
Nepal



89. A hanging lamp  
with simple arch. Height  
30 cm. 17th century,  
Nepal





81. Vaishnava Deepa  
A chain lamp  
wrought in the  
traditional symbols of  
Vishnu. Height 40  
cm. 17th century,  
South India



85. A chain lamp in the  
pattern of a parrot. It has  
three wicks. Height 20 cm.  
17th century, Gujarat



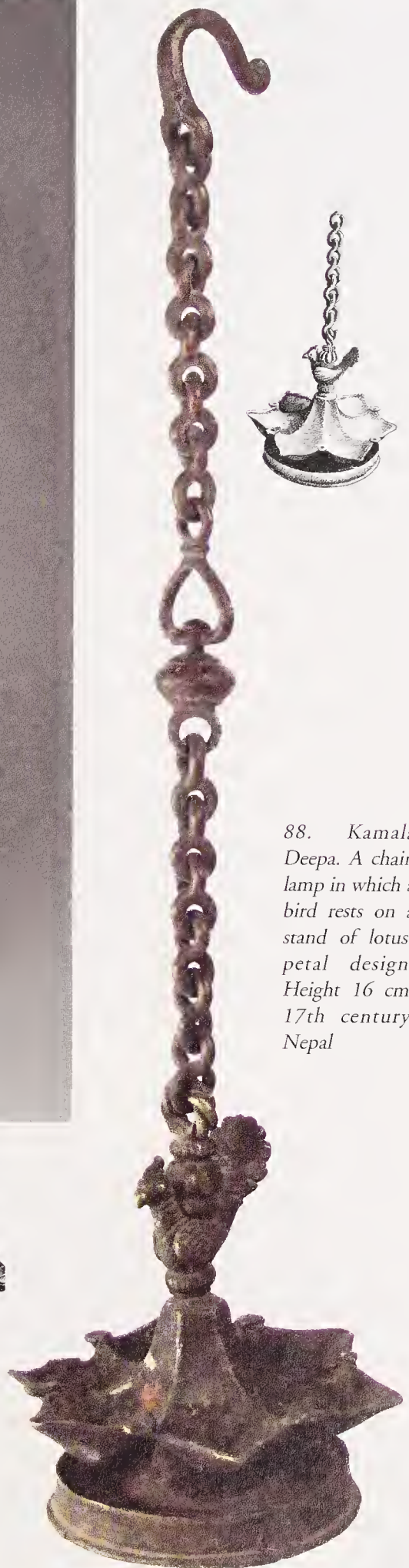
92. A three-bowl  
'Kirtimukha' hanging  
lamp from South India.  
Height 32 cm. 18th  
century







91. An exquisitely-made elephant lamp with 36 wicks. The oil tank is under the feet of the elephant. Height 30 cm. 16th century, Deccan.



88. Kamala Deepa. A chain lamp in which a bird rests on a stand of lotus-petal design. Height 16 cm. 17th century, Nepal





93. A votive chain lamp with a swan at the top and the bowl below, Height 34 cm. 16th century, South India

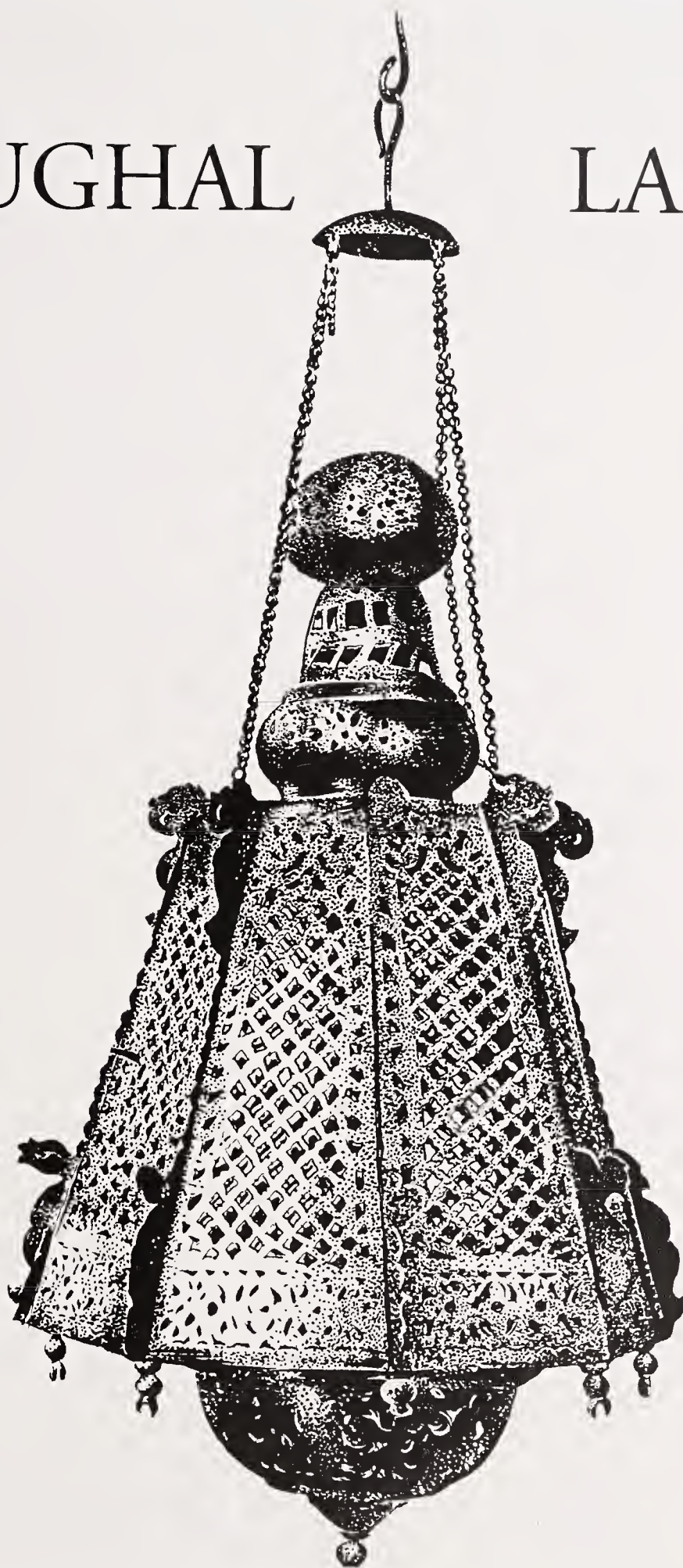


94. A siphon lamp in the shape of a pigeon. The base has three wicks, and the body of the bird holds the oil. Note the ingenious workmanship on the chain, which is made up of figures of six musicians. Height 20 cm. 17th century, Rajasthan



# MUGHAL

# LAMPS



95. Mughal-type lamp of  
19th century, Height 48 cm.





97. Another intricately perforated Mughal lamp. Height 48 cm. 19th century



96. A globular hanging lamp. Height 42 cm.



98. Box-shaped Mughal lamp, 19th century, North India



99. Bowl-shaped Mughal lamp. Height 30 cm. 19th century





100. A Mughal lamp of the 18th century, Height 82 cm.

101. A cage-like lamp of the Mughal variety. After the lamp was lit, the cloth was wrapped around the framework. Height 60 cm. 18th century, Hyderabad







102. An elegant Mughal lamp of the 18th century.  
Height 48 cm.



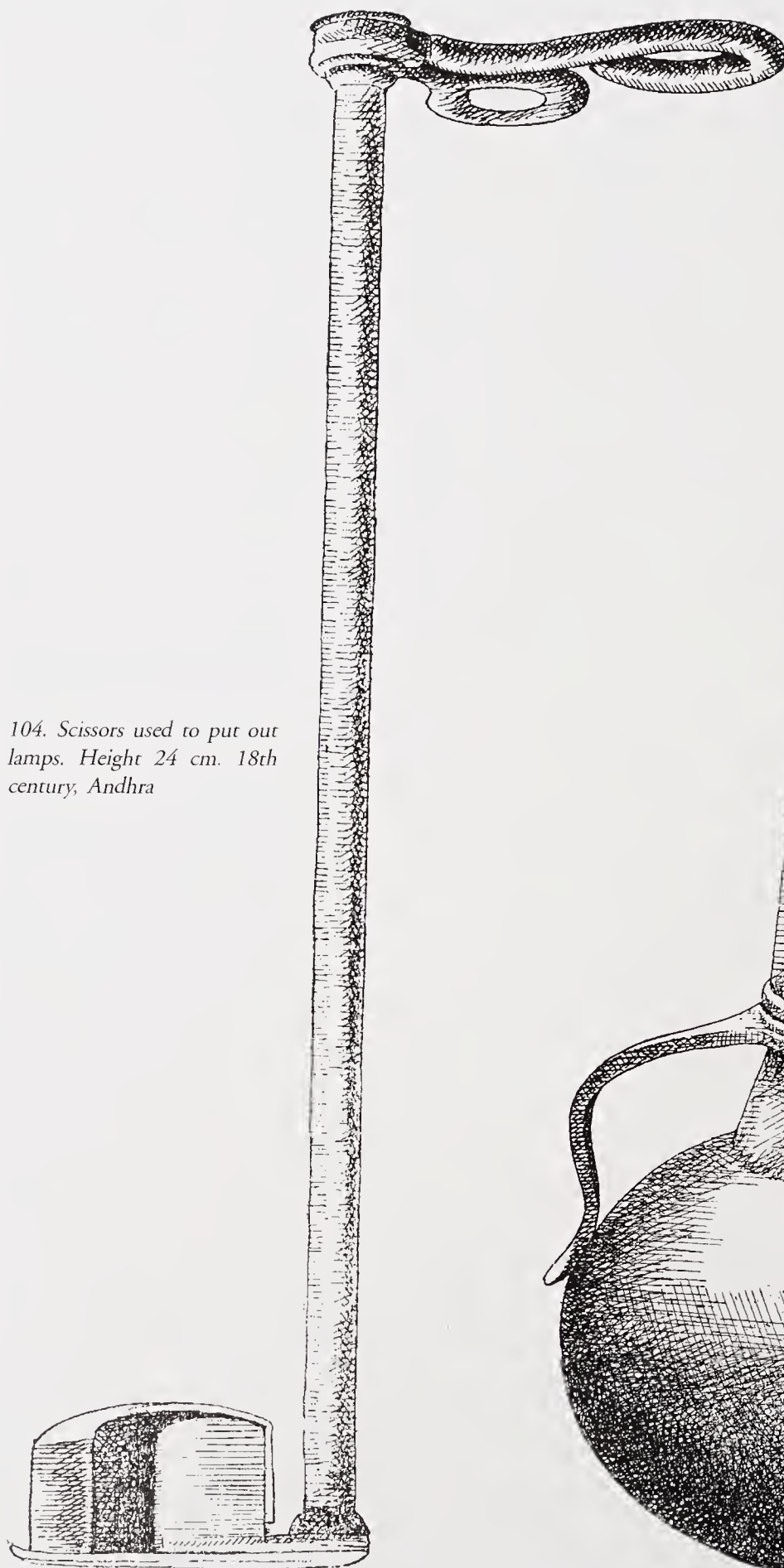
# A LOOK AT SOME OTHER LAMPS



103. A coconut-shaped lamp carried by messengers and attendants. The body holds a large stock of oil and the wick is fixed at the top nozzle. Height 18 cm. 16th century, Andhra







104. Scissors used to put out lamps. Height 24 cm. 18th century, Andhra



105. Oil container for feeding lamps. Height 36 cm. 16th century, Deccan





106. A carved wooden bracket which could be driven into the wall to serve as a stand for bowl-lamps. Height 20 cm. 18th century, Gujarat







108. A votive lamp with bowls at the four corners of the central pedestal.  
Height 17 cm. 15th century, Karnataka





107. An elephant lamp with a 'Kirtimukha' handle, Height 21 cm. 19th century, Nepal







109. A lamp in the shape of a double bull float.  
Height 20 cm. 18th century, Karnataka



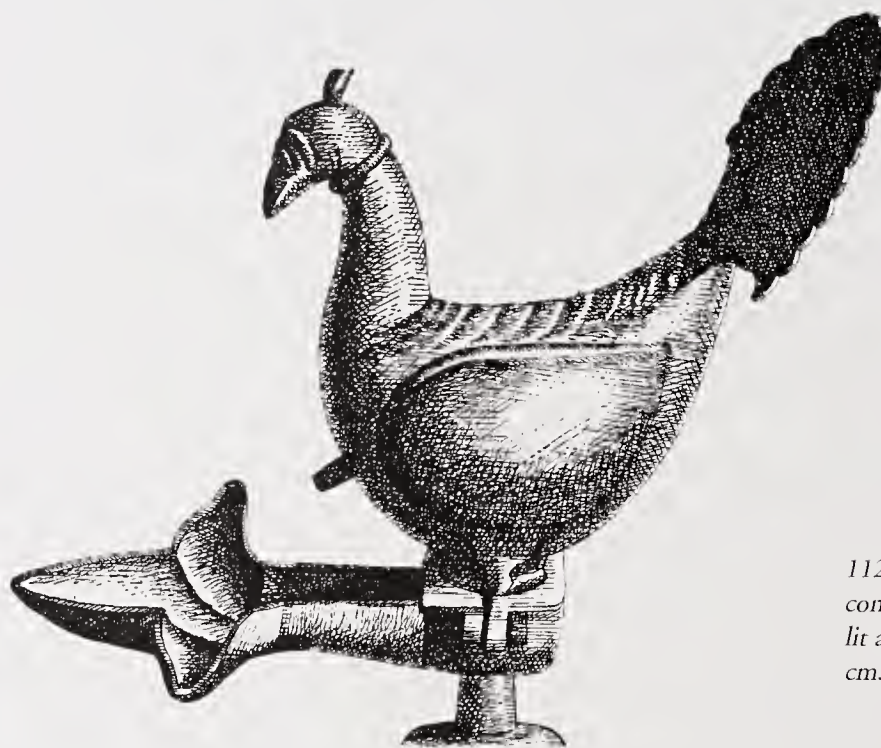




110. A swan and elephant  
lamp used to light inner  
chambers. Height 17 cm.  
18th century, Deccan

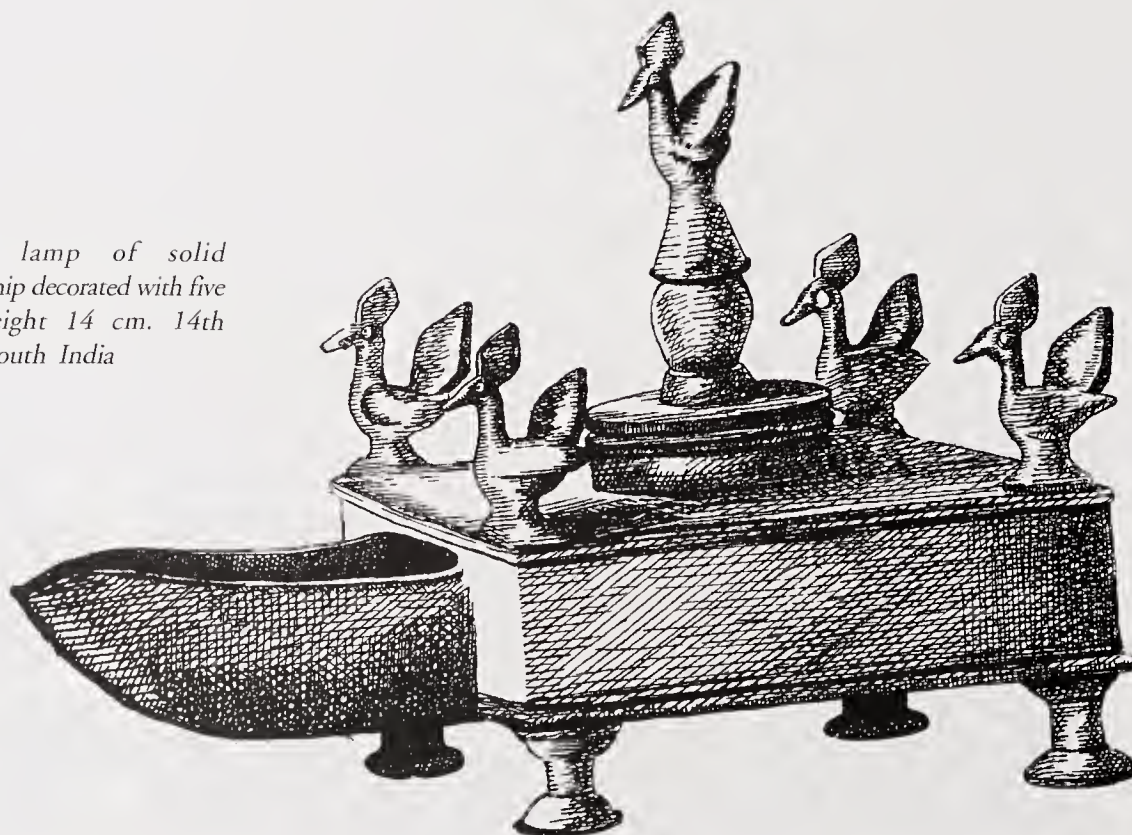






112. A peacock-lamp of folk conception. Three wicks can be lit around the bowl. Height 23 cm. 18th century, Rajasthan

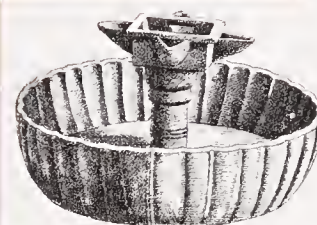
111. A lamp of solid workmanship decorated with five birds. Height 14 cm. 14th century, South India







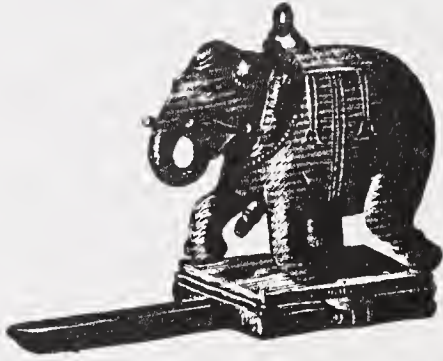
114. A lamp used in the worship of the Tulsi plant. Height 10 cm. 17th century, Andhra



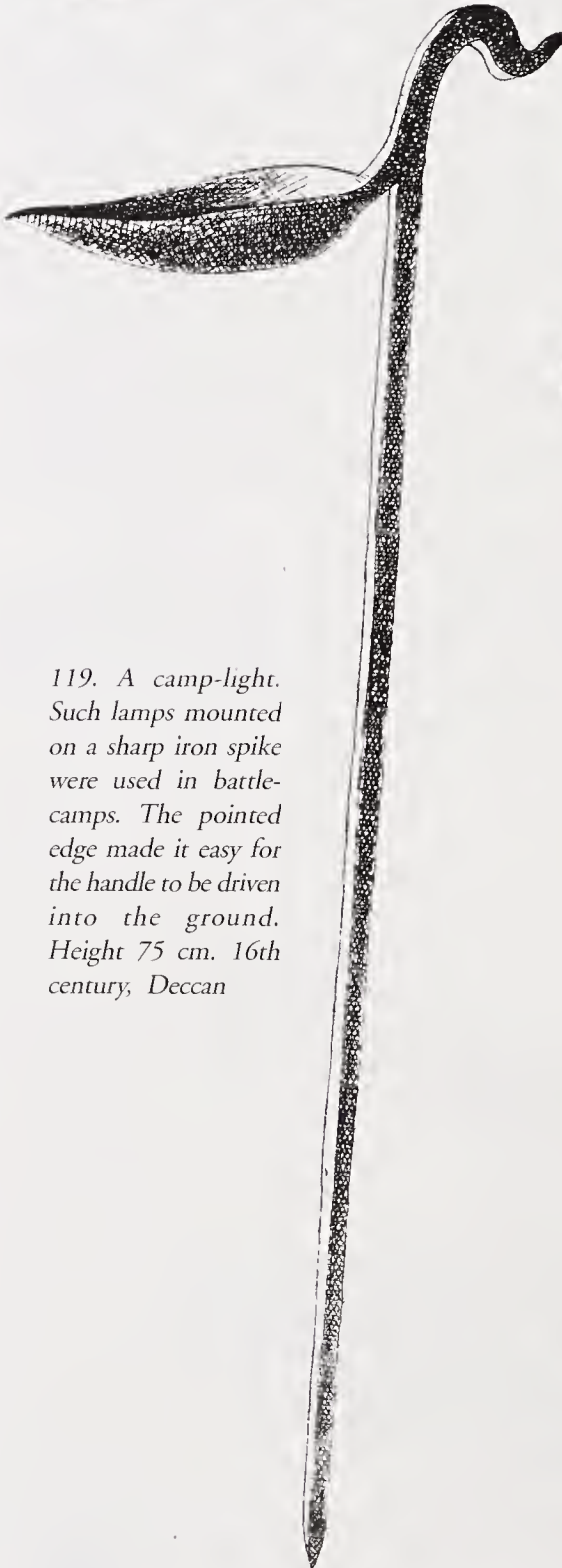
113. Jyoti Deepa Lamp used to light other lamps and to furnish them with oil. Height 9 cm.



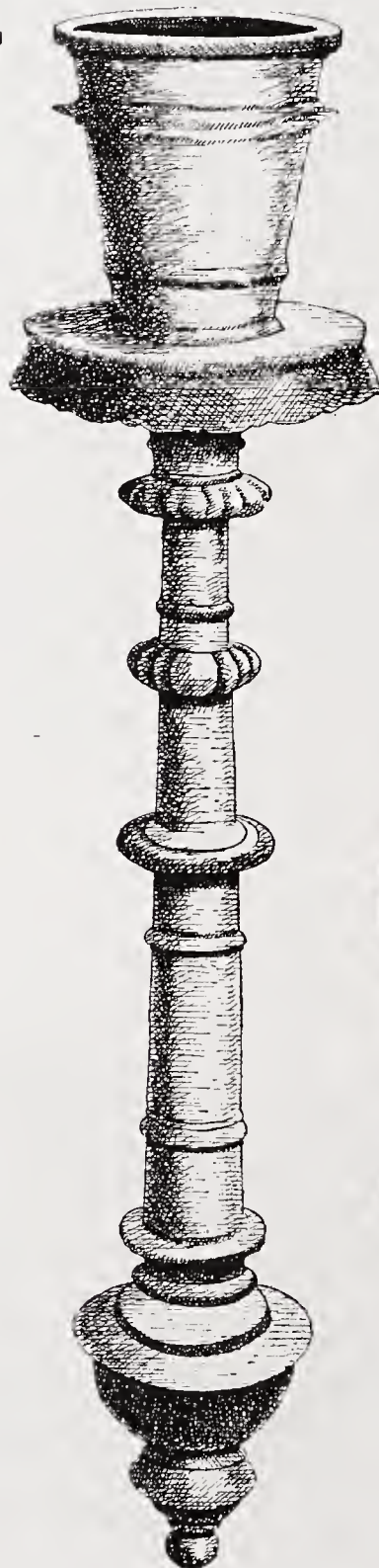




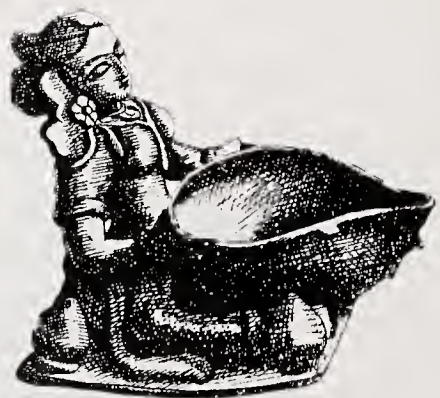
115. A small-sized elephant lamp. Height 8 cm. 17th century, Gujarat



119. A camp-light. Such lamps mounted on a sharp iron spike were used in battle-camps. The pointed edge made it easy for the handle to be driven into the ground. Height 75 cm. 16th century, Deccan



122. A 'mashal' or torch used by footmen in processions. Height 56 cm. 18th century, Deccan

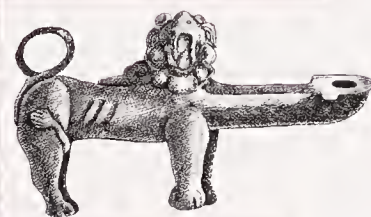


121. A young women with a bowl. Height 5 cm. 12th century, South India





116. A lion-shaped lamp. Height 12 cm.  
18th century, Northern India



123. A boat-shaped votive lamp with a bird's  
head. Height 5 cm. 18th century, Orissa







117. A votive lamp with a row of musicians shown as supporting the oil-wells.  
Height 18 cm. 18th century, South India





118. Smriti Deepa, a commemoration lamp. Height 25 cm. 19th century, Nepal







120. Another commemoration lamp.  
Height 12 cm. 19th century, Nepal





## Archaeological Chronology

*'The word lamp is derived from the Greek word lampas, meaning torch. It is generally agreed that the evolution of handmade lamps moved from bowl-shaped to saucer-shaped, then from saucer with a nozzle, to a closed bowl with a spout'.*

According to historians, it is very difficult to say when and where the first oil lamp was used. Historical records have never been able to draw a line detailing when the primitive forms of creating a continuous source of light from fire can be termed a lamp. The first lamps were made of naturally occurring objects, like coconuts, sea shells, egg shells and hollow stones. Some believe that the first proper lamps were carved from stones. Curved stone lamps were found in places dated to the 10th millennium BCE. (Mesolithic, Middle Stone Age Period, circa 10,300 - 8000 BCE)

Some Archaeologists claim that the first shell-lamps were in existence more than 6,000 years ago. (Neolithic, Later Stone Age, c. 8500 - 4500 BCE). They believe that the alabaster shell-shaped lamps dug up in Sumerian sites dating 2,600 BCE were imitations of real shell-lamps that were used for a long time. (Early Bronze, Canaanite / Bronze I-IV, c.3300 - 2000 BCE). Around the 7th century BC, the Greeks began making terracotta lamps to replace handheld torches.

### **Chalcolithic Age, c.4500 - 3300 BCE**

This is the period when the first manufactured red pottery oil lamps appeared. These were of the round bowl type.

### **The Bronze Ages (3200-1200 BCE)**

In this period, lamps were simple wheel-made bowls with a slight pinch on four sides for the wick. Later lamps had only one pinch. These lamps vary in the shape of the rim, the general shape of the bowl and the shape of the base.

### **Intermediate Bronze Age lamps**

The earliest lamps known from Intermediate Bronze Age lamps is the four wick lamp. These lamps were made from large bowls with four shallow pinches for wicks.

### **Middle Bronze Age lamps**

Though the four-wick oil lamps continued to be in use in this period, most of the lamps had one wick. Early in this period the pinch was shallow, while later on it became more prominent and the mouth protruded from the lamp's body. The bases were simple and flat. The crude potter's wheel was introduced, transforming the handmade bowls to a more uniform container. The saucer style evolved into a single spout shape.



## Late Bronze Age lamps

This period saw the development of a more pronounced, deeper single spout and it was almost closed on the sides. The shape evolved to be more triangular, deeper and larger. All lamps were now wheel-made. The base was simple, usually flat.

## The Iron Age (1200-560 BCE)

With the discovery of Iron, the rim became wider and flatter with a deeper and higher spout. The tip of the spout was more upright in contrast to the rest of the rim.

The lamps were becoming variable in shape and distribution. We still find lamps similar to the Late Bronze period. In addition, other forms evolved, such as small lamps with a flat base and larger lamps with a round base. In the later Iron Age, we encounter variant forms. One common type was small, with a wide rim and a wide base. Another type was a small, shallow bowl with a thick and high discus base.

## Persian

These large lamps have thin sides and a deep pinch, which flattens the mouth and makes it protrude outward.

## Greek

Lamps were more closed to avoid spilling. They were smaller and more refined. Most of them were handleless. The nozzle was elongated. The rim was folded over to make the nozzle, so it overlapped and was then pinched to make the wick hole.

They were round in shape, wheel-made.

## Early Roman

Production of oil-lamps shifted to Italy as the main source of supply. Molds were used. All lamps were closed in type and produced in large scale in factories. The lamp was produced in two parts, the upper part with the spout and the lower part with the fuel chamber. Most were of the characteristic Imperial Type. It was round with nozzles of different forms (volute, semi-volute, U shaped), with a closed body and with a central disk decorated with reliefs and its filling hole.

## Late Roman

### The High Imperial Type

More decorations were used. Produced locally or imported in large scale. The multiple-nozzled lamps appeared. In this period we found the frog type lamps. These were kidney or heart shaped or oval. With the motif of a frog or its abstraction, and sometimes with geometrical motifs. They were produced around 100 AD. They were so variant that it was seldom that two identical ones were found.



## Byzantine

Slipper shaped. Very decorative. The multiple nozzles continued. Most with handles. Some were complex in external anatomy.

## Early Islamic

There was a transition from Byzantine to Islamic lamps. Lamps of this transition period changed from being decorated with crosses, animals, human likenesses, birds, fish, etc., to being decorated with plain linear, geometric, and raised dot patterns. The early Islamic lamps were a continuation of Byzantine lamps. Decorations were initially a stylized form of bird, grain, tree, plant or flower. Then they became entirely geometric or linear with raised dots.

## Lighting Fuels

Early lighting fuels consisted of olive oil, beeswax, fish oil, whale oil, sesame oil, nut oil, and similar substances. These were the most commonly used fuels until the late 18th century. However, the ancient Chinese collected natural gas in skins that was used for illumination.





## Lamps /Lights in other religions

### Judaism

Lamps appear in the Torah and other Jewish sources as a symbol of “lighting” the way for the righteous, the wise, and for love and other positive values. While fire was often described as being destructive, light was given a positive spiritual meaning. The oil lamp and its light were important household items, and this may explain their symbolism. Oil lamps were used for many spiritual rituals. The oil lamp and its light also became important ritualistic articles with the further development of Jewish culture and religion.

### Chanukah (Hanukkah, the Hebrew word)

Also known as the Festival of Lights is an eight-day Jewish holiday, commemorating the rededication of the Holy Temple (the Second Temple) in Jerusalem at the time of the Maccabean Revolt of the 2nd century BCE. Hanukkah is observed for eight nights and days, starting on the 25th day of Kislev according to the Hebrew calendar, which may occur at any time from late November to late December in the Gregorian calendar.

### Christianity

There are several references to oil lamps in the New Testament: In the Orthodox Church and many Eastern Catholic Churches oil lamps (Greek: kandili, Slavonic: lampada) are still used both on the Holy Table (altar) and to illuminate icons on the iconostasis and around the temple (church building). Orthodox Christians also use oil lamps in their homes to illuminate their icon corner.

Traditionally, the sanctuary lamp in an Orthodox church is an oil lamp. It is lit by the bishop when the church is consecrated, and ideally it should burn perpetually thereafter. The oil burned in all of these lamps is traditionally olive oil.

In Greece and Cyprus, lampáda is the special name for the candle held by the faithful on the Easter service celebrating the Resurrection. Although any regular paraffin or beeswax candle can be used, a lampáda is usually a large, white candle or, in the case of children, a multicolored candle decorated with ribbons, beads, toys, dried flowers etc. The lampáda is lit at midnight, with the holy light from the priest's candle, and then carried home. The sign of the cross is often made with soot from this flame on the lintel above the home's main door, and the flame is transferred to the icon corner oil lamp; only then can the lampáda be extinguished.

### Islam

“God is the Light of the heavens and the earth. The parable of His light is, as it were, that of a niche containing a lamp; the lamp is [enclosed] in glass, the glass [shining] like a radiant star: [a lamp] lit from a blessed tree - an olive-tree that is neither of the east nor of the west the oil whereof [is so bright that it] would well-nigh give light [of itself] even though fire had not touched it: light upon light! God guides unto His light him that wills



[to be guided]; and [to this end] God propounds parables unto men, since God [alone] has full knowledge of all things”.

In Islam, lighting lamps is not done. In the Quran, the book of Islamic scripture, a chapter is devoted to the importance of the inner spiritual light that connects the pious to Allah. Muslims do not light lamps for religious occasions because to do so would constitute adding something extra to the fundamental teachings of Islam.

## **Chinese folk religion**

Oil lamps are lit at traditional Chinese shrines before either an image of a deity or a plaque with Classical Chinese characters giving the name of the deity. Such lamps are usually made from clear glass (they look similar to normal drinking glasses) and are filled with oil, sometimes with water underneath. A cork or plastic floater containing a wick is placed on top of the oil with the bottom of the wick submerged in the oil. Such lamps are kept burning in shrines, whether private or public, and incense sticks or joss sticks are lit from the lamp.

## **Tibetan Buddhism**

Small brass lamps filled with clarified yak butter (ghee) or vegetable oil are used in Buddhist festivals and temples to aid in mental focus and meditation. Light from the lamps is significant for removing darkness, and symbolizes the transformation involved in the quest for enlightenment.





## Production Methods

Before the invention of the wheel in the Middle Bronze Age, lamps were made by hand. An early form of the potter's wheel was invented and introduced in the Middle Bronze Age and used to manufacture lamps until around the 3rd century BCE. The use of molds was first developed in Greece and Egypt during the 3rd century BCE. In Roman times, stone, clay, or plaster molds were utilized on a large scale across the Roman Empire until around the 8th century CE.

To make a lamp, two molds are needed: one for the upper part and one for the lower part. Some pairs of molds have knobs and corresponding holes to fit the two molds together. In order to create the mold, an archetype or patris is first made. Plaster or clay is then formed around the patris, which dries and hardens into a mold. Clay molds are removed from the patris before they are fully dried. They are then kiln fired, thus they may deviate or shrink from their original form. Clay molds need more labor than plaster ones. However, clay molds are more durable. Plaster molds are dried completely and then removed from the patris. Plaster thus makes an accurate replica, but it has the disadvantage of leaving some surface granular artifacts. Due to the perishable nature of plaster, it has proven difficult to find remains of ancient plaster molds. Several clay molds, however, have been recovered. By studying the surfaces of surviving lamps it seems that plaster was preferred to clay.

### Lamp typology

Lamps can be categorized based on different criteria, including material (Clay, Silver, Bronze, Gold, Stone, slip), shape, structure, design, and imagery (e.g. symbolic, religious, mythological, erotic, battles, hunting).

### Lamp typological categories

Typologically, lamps of the Ancient Mediterranean can be divided into following categories:-

i). Wheel made, ii). Volute, Early Imperial iii). High Imperial iv). Frog v).Slipper lamps vi). Factory lamps.





## Structure and Function

Oil lamps were used not only for household lighting, but also for funerary and votive purposes. Lamps were used for domestic purposes in homes and for public purposes in temples and most public buildings.

By studying the lamp's designs, symbols, structure and decorations, and the material of which it is made, we can identify the age and perhaps the locality of the lamp. The lamp can also give us insights into the culture of its users and their social status.

### Components

The following are the main external parts of a terra-cotta lamp.

- Shoulder
- Pouring mole

The hole through which fuel is put inside the fuel chamber. The width ranges from 0.5-5 cm in general. There may be single or multiple holes.

- Pick hole, and the nozzle.

It may be just an opening in the body of the lamp, or an elongated nozzle. In some specific types of lamps there is a groove on the superior aspect of the nozzle that runs to the pouring hole to collect back the oozing oil from the wick.

- Handle

Lamps come with and without a handle. The handle comes in different shapes. The most common is ring shaped for the forefinger surmounted by a palmette on which the thumb is pressed to stabilize the lamp. Other handles are crescent shaped, triangular and semi-oval. The handleless lamps usually have an elongated nozzle, and sometimes have a lug rising diagonally from the periphery.

- Discus
- Volute
- Fuel chamber

Wicks and Fuel are essential replaceable components of the lamp.

A wick is placed over the nozzle and extends into the fuel chamber. Most lamps come with one nozzle; a few lamps have more, from two to twenty nozzles. However, the more nozzles, the greater the fuel consumption.



The wick was made of different materials, linen, flax, papyrus, tow, or ordinary rush. The thickness of the wick is an important factor too; thin wicks burn fuel more slowly than thick ones.

Fuels used for oil lamps depend on such variables as the location, time period and perhaps the reason for the lamp's use; ceremonial use of lamps for instance may require a particular oil or fragrance to be used. The main fuel in Western nations was olive oil in ancient Mediterranean cultures, though extracts from fish, crude fish oil, nuts, and cheese were also used. In much later times whale oil was favoured for its cleaner burning flame. Oozing crude petroleum was also used. The fuel was poured into the fuel reservoir via the pouring hole in the discus.

Castor oil was used by the ancient Egyptians. In Africa, carrot oil, peanut oil, mustard oil and nettle oil are used. Indian lamps, especially for use in puja, almost exclusively use ghee as fuel.

Among other fuels used have been coal oil and paraffin/kerosene in paraffin lamps (also called kerosene lamps and coal oil lamps). Oil lamps can use many other fuels including jathropa seed oil and biodiesel along with wvo(waste vegetable oil), soybean oil, canola oil, hemp seed oil, sunflower seed oil, and olive oil.











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